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SCRIPTURE DIFFICULTIES

“It must not be dissembled that there are many real difficulties in the Christian Scriptures; whilst, at the same time, more, I believe, and greater, may justly be imputed to certain maxims of interpretation, which have obtained authority without reason, and are received without inquiry.”
—DR. PALEY.

“It becomes the imperative duty of all who love the truth in Christ to purge it, so far as they can, from the alloy which it may have contracted in the course of ages, through the admixture of human conceits.”—
ARCHDEACON HARE.

SCRIPTURE DIFFICULTIES

EXPLAINED BY

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Or, the Bible its own Interpreter

By THOMAS SPALDING

LONDON
DALDY, ISBISTER & CO.
56, LUDGATE HILL

1877

LONDON :
PRINTED BY VIRTUE AND CO., LIMITED,
CITY ROAD.

PREFACE.

THE writer of the following Essay has, for nearly sixty years, devoted some portion of every day to the study of the Bible. During this long period his views of the fundamental doctrines it reveals have not been materially altered. The truths which gave him peace when a boy are the sure foundation on which he rests in the near prospect of eternity. The light which beamed on his path, when commencing the journey of life, glows peacefully and with heavenly radiance at its close. On some minor points, however, his views have been considerably modified; difficulties which for many years perplexed him have been removed; principles of interpretation, of which formerly he was ignorant, have been adopted; and he has, by long and attentive study, gained a connected view of the whole subject—an attainment not merely valuable, but

absolutely essential to the clear understanding of the several parts of the sacred volume.

From his oft-repeated experience of the hasty judgment passed by many excellent people on those who differ from them in opinion, he is quite prepared to hear some of his views pronounced heterodox. The soundness of his faith was once questioned because, on hearing a friend speak of the *apple* which Eve ate, he ventured to say that the Bible nowhere stated that she did eat an apple. This was a startling assertion; but when he further declared that there was no mention in the Bible of *Mount* Calvary, a fear was expressed that he had departed far from the narrow path of orthodoxy! Yet his friend, with Bible in hand, could find neither the apple nor the mountain. Many words and phrases, very popular in Christian society, are frequently quoted as Scripture, although not found there. For example, Trinity—The decrees of God—Original sin—The imputed righteousness of Christ—Effectual calling—Final perseverance—Sacraments—Eucharist—The consummation of all things, &c. Many who speak much of “the merits of Christ” may be surprised to learn that the word *merit* is not once used either in the Old or the New Testament. These

conventional terms may represent Christian doctrines, or they may represent human conceits. In investigating Scripture truth, it is desirable, as far as possible, to use only Scripture terms. To "hold fast the form of sound words" is an apostolic injunction, and one carefully to be observed by all who desire to cultivate "faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. i. 13).

The author has not sought to originate anything. His simple object has been to interpret the language, and thus to ascertain the meaning of Holy Scripture. In endeavouring to accomplish this he has adopted as an axiom the great truth, that "SCRIPTURE IS ITS OWN BEST INTERPRETER." By comparing its related portions, he has endeavoured to explain those things which are difficult by those which are simple, and to discover what is unknown by what is well known. He has found Cruden's "Concordance" to be by far the best commentary on the Bible; and he strongly urges all who desire to understand the Word of God to avail themselves of the invaluable help afforded by the unexampled labours of this gifted man.

The writer does not address the learned, but

rather the multitude of Bible readers who find, as he himself formerly did, great difficulties in many portions of the sacred volume. To such he desires to give the benefit of his prolonged experience and research. He hopes especially that his efforts may be useful to that most important class of Christian labourers, the Sabbath-school and evangelistic teachers.

He has made large use of the writings of learned divines, but never without acknowledgment. In some cases, although his interpretations have been the result of his own studies, if subsequently he has found the same thoughts expressed by an author of great repute, he has preferred quoting such an authority to giving the interpretation in his own words, choosing thus to shelter himself behind the sevenfold shield of some spiritual Achilles rather than stand, undefended, the assault, whether of friend or foe. While fully conscious of many defects, he does not deprecate honest criticism; only he desires his interpretations to be received not as those of "one having authority:" he wishes them to be treated as suggestions, not as assertions. That he has adopted the right principle of interpretation he has no doubt. That he may

sometimes have erred in the application of this principle he admits. In such cases he will be glad to have his errors pointed out, as his sole desire is to ascertain the truth, and to make it known.

The testimony of that great Oriental scholar, Sir William Jones, to the value of the Bible, is worth recording here. He says, "I have regularly and attentively read these Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion that this volume, independently of its Divine origin, contains more true sublimity, more exquisite beauty, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of poetry and eloquence than are to be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been written."

To this testimony to the beauties of Scripture, given by so competent a judge, may be added the witness of our great modern philosopher as to its truthfulness and earnestness. "The *Bible*," says Thomas Carlyle, "in all changes of theory about it, has this as its highest distinction, that it is the *truest* of all books."—(*Miscellanies*, No. 6.) And in his "Life of Sterling" he states how his friend, in his last illness, "read a good deal,—earnest books; the Bible, most earnest of books, his chief favourite."

To assist the reader to understand and to appreciate the volume which Sir William Jones pronounced to be the most sublime and most exquisitely beautiful of all books, and which Thomas Carlyle declares to be the most truthful and most earnest of all books—a volume combining the greatest beauty with the greatest truth and the greatest earnestness—is the design of the following Essay.

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CHAPTER I.

ON SCRIPTURE DIFFICULTIES, AND THEIR USE.

“Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.”—PSALM cxix. 18.

“Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.”—LUKE xxiv. 45.

NO thoughtful man will be staggered by the acknowledged fact that difficulties abound in Holy Scripture. If, as all Christians believe, the Author of Nature is also the Author of the inspired volume, the same features may be expected to characterize each revelation of himself. In the material world, which reveals the “eternal power and Godhead” of his Creator, man finds himself surrounded with difficulties; and if, in the additional revelation which God has made in his holy Word, difficulties no less perplexing abound, this is an argument in its favour, rather than otherwise, for we trace the marks of the same Divine hand in both. It has been said, by an eminent modern writer, that “if a pro-

fessed revelation were given without *mystery* and *difficulty*, it would be in such startling contrast with all the analogies of the previous revelation in nature, that it would rather be an obstacle to receiving it than not.”—*The Superhuman Origin of the Bible*, by Henry Rogers, p. 405.

The existence of these difficulties is recognised by the inspired writers themselves. St. Peter, speaking of St. Paul’s Epistles, says, “In which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” Is it not very strange that, although both apostles were aware that those “things hard to be understood” in the writings of St. Paul were thus “wrested by the unlearned and unstable,” and with such destructive consequences, yet neither of these inspired men made any effort to explain such difficulties? The reason of their silence is well pointed out by the learned Dr. Lightfoot, who says, “The Holy Ghost hath so penned Scripture as to set men to study.”—*Works*, vol. iii. p. 327.

It may be objected that a revelation designed to secure the salvation of mankind ought to be so clear and simple as to be easily understood by all; that there should be “line upon line, and precept upon precept,” so that “he may run that readeth.” Well, in all that is essential to a sin-

ner's salvation the Word of God is thus clear and explicit. The simple, elementary truths of the Gospel may be understood by a child. All that is necessary to secure salvation is an unre-served reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ, as our only Saviour from sin and from all its consequences. Equally plain is the teaching of Scripture respecting our Christian duties; for all practical obedience is enjoined in the command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart: and thy neighbour as thyself." This is all that it is essential for us to know both of doctrine and of duty; but it is very far from being all that the Bible reveals. The sacred volume is rich in truths which we never should have discerned without its light; truths respecting the Divine nature, the providence of God, and His moral government of the world; truths concerning man in his present state of probation, and also his future existence. All these are subjects of intense interest, and worthy of profound investigation; but a man unlearned may enjoy peace with God, and daily please his Father in heaven, yet remain ignorant of these mysteries. This diversity of mental power and of knowledge is recognised in Scripture; milk is provided for "babes, that they may grow thereby" (1 Peter ii. 2); whilst "strong meat" is supplied to those who, "by reason of use,

have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil " (Heb. v. 14).

A striking analogy may be traced between the knowledge requisite to preserve our animal life and that which is essential to secure our spiritual well-being. The most uneducated man knows instinctively that he must eat to satisfy his hunger ; here his knowledge stops ; and it is all that is necessary to preserve his life. He thinks little of the nourishment of his body ; and as to the processes by which his food is assimilated, and becomes part of his physical frame—flesh, blood, muscle, bones, and nerves—this mysterious transformation never enters his mind or disturbs his digestion. Yet his knowledge is adequate for the preservation of his health and the supply of all his bodily wants. It is the man of thought, the man of science, who inquires into the reason of things ; who traces the connection between cause and effect ; who perplexes himself with difficulties which never cast a shade on the labourer's enjoyment ; but who, when successful in his investigations, enjoys an exquisite delight (to which the other is a stranger) in tracing the hand of God in his works, and in discovering the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of the Creator, concealed in objects which, at a cursory glance, presented, probably, an opposite appearance. Again, the food which is essential to

man's bodily existence springs up on the surface, and is easily gathered; but the mineral wealth of the earth, the coal, the iron, the gold, silver, and precious stones—so essential to the progress of the human family—can be procured only by the inventions and appliances of science, by great and persevering labour, and by digging deep into the bowels of the earth.

All scientific knowledge is the result of labour and perseverance. Our first impressions, even of material objects, are generally false and have to be corrected. The student of Nature, no less than the student of Scripture, has need to observe the command, "Judge not according to outward appearance." Throughout the material universe, objects are not what they appear to be; and it is only by scientific discovery that we learn to correct our first impressions of external things. For many centuries it was believed that our earth was flat, and the learned of various nations puzzled themselves to ascertain on what foundation it rested; but science has demonstrated that it is round. The sun appears to go round the earth; but science assures us that the earth goes round the sun. The stars appear to us to be only small brilliant lights in heaven; but science teaches us that they are worlds, many of them much greater than our own. The knowledge of these facts was not attained with-

out much severe and protracted labour. As in the material, so in the spiritual world, our first impressions of Scripture statements are often false. Its truths are not to be gathered like wild flowers; its realities are not to be discerned by a casual or a cursory glance. Its prizes are awarded, not to the careless and superficial observer, but to the patient and prayerful student. Those who would secure the prize of heavenly wisdom must carefully observe the directions of the wisest of men:—

“ My son, if thou wilt receive my words,
And hide my commandments with thee;
So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom,
And apply thine heart to understanding;
Yea, if thou criest after knowledge,
And liftest up thy voice for understanding;
If thou seekest her as silver,
And searchest for her as for hid treasures;
Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord,
And find the knowledge of God ” (Prov. ii. 1—5).

“ The fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God ” constitute the “ wisdom that cometh from above ”—the wisdom which is more precious than rubies, and of which it is said, “ All the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.”

The difficulties which beset thoughtful men in studying natural phenomena are evidently de-

signed by God to call into vigorous exercise their intellectual powers, and thus to develop and perfect them. The wisdom of the Creator is manifested by this adaptation of external things to man's intellectual faculties. That partial concealment, so obvious in the material world, may be expected in the spiritual world: that which is seen in Nature may be looked for also in Revelation. The object in both departments is the same—to cultivate those intellectual powers and those moral affections which distinguish man from the merely animal creation. In no field of inquiry, perhaps, has so deep an interest been taken as in the investigation of the difficulties found in the Word of God. No subject has caused greater pain to the sincere inquirer, and none has yielded greater joy than the discovery of those truths by which darkness is dispelled and the soul enabled to walk in the light.

In a lecture on "The Superhuman Origin of the Bible," Professor Rogers remarks, "If this be a revelation, it is submitted to us under conditions similar to those on which the works of God and His providential government of the world are submitted to us—exacting profound study, investigation, and reflection. Man in the physical world is to be, as Bacon says, 'the minister and interpreter of Nature.' If the Bible be from the same source, it is in analogy with this that he is sum-

moned to the same functions here. The Bible has its difficulties and mysteries, as Nature has; and it requires, just as Nature does, prolonged thought and effort to penetrate or decipher them. Both have their level plains, where the eye sees far, and the feet travel softly; but both have also lofty summits, which only persevering toil can scale, and deep abysses which keen eyes and adventurous feet can alone explore. And such things are probably found in both for the same reason—to make ample provision for the moral and intellectual discipline of man” (p. 385).

Scripture difficulties are designed to cultivate not only our intellectual powers, but also our moral and spiritual affections. We are taught plainly in the Bible that a man’s reception or his rejection of Divine truth depends more upon the state of his heart than of his head. It was because Israel *erred in heart* that they did not *know* God’s ways (Ps. xcv. 10). The prophet Daniel declares, “None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand” (xii. 10). And again, when mourning before God on account of all the judgments brought upon His people for their transgressions, he says, “As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth” (ix. 13).

Hence we are taught that all who desire to understand God's truth must first turn from their iniquities; for sin blinds the understanding, whilst it hardens the heart. Not less pointed are the words addressed by our Lord to the Jews: "How *can* ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John v. 44.) Their seeking honour of man, rather than of God, proved that they were not "Israelites indeed," for they were strangers to that circumcision which is "of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. ii. 29). This carnal pride was the cause of their unbelief, and of their rejection of the Messiah; and, consequently, of their own rejection by the Almighty. The apostle Peter, in the text already quoted, plainly intimates that those who "wrested to their own destruction" the writings of St. Paul, did so through ignorance and instability; not through unavoidable ignorance, for we are taught to "have compassion on the ignorant" (Heb. v. 2), but because they "*willingly* were ignorant" (2 Peter iii. 5). Instability is another cause of their wresting Scripture, of which mental defect Reuben is the type; and those who indulge in Reuben's sins will incur his doom—"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel" (Gen. xlix. 4). This is emphatically true as to excellence in

Divine knowledge. Those who are "laden with sins," and "led away by divers lusts," may be "ever learning," but they "will never come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. iii. 6, 7). "Men of corrupt minds" will be "reprobate concerning the faith" (ver. 8). The apostle speaks of "them that are defiled and unbelieving" (Titus i. 15), as if the latter were the consequence of the former. In apostolic times, one prominent cause why men "erred from the faith" is traced to "the love of money, the root of all evil" (1 Tim. vi. 10). The same cause now will produce the same result as then. It is only those who receive the truth into "an honest and good heart, who keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke viii. 15).

Having pointed out those states of mind which unfit a man for the reception of Divine truth, we may briefly state what mental qualifications are necessary in order to its cordial reception.

1. Humility. Those who would learn of Him who is meek and lowly in heart must not approach their Divine Teacher in a haughty and proud spirit. Some affinity must exist between the Master and the disciple. Our Lord commenced his ministry by pronouncing a blessing on "the poor in spirit" (Matt. v. 3). He taught his disciples, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye

shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 3). Pride is the besetting sin of human nature. To destroy this evil was one primary object of our Saviour's ministry. His whole life, as well as his teaching, was a protest against pride. The Son of God humbled himself, became the son of man, lived a life of poverty and suffering, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; and all this in order that He might, both by precept and example, teach his disciples that they must cast off the filthy garment of pride, and "be clothed with humility." This is the becoming robe in which every disciple of Christ must appear before his Master. Only the truly humble can receive the truths of the Gospel. These are too humiliating for the proud in heart. It is "the meek" whom God will "guide in judgment," and to whom "He will teach his way" (Ps. xxv. 9).

All such feel their need of divine teaching, and welcome the promises made in the Word of God to supply this necessary aid. All earnest searchers after the truth have felt their need of Divine illumination, and have prayed with the psalmist, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. cxix. 18). They feel how much they need "the Spirit of truth to guide them into all truth" (John xvi. 13); they value the promise accord-

ingly, and seek to realise its fulfilment in their own experience. They pray that He who opened the understanding of his apostles, that they might understand the Scriptures, will open their understanding also; and they cordially unite with the apostle in his prayer, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him;" and that "the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened" (Eph. i. 17, 18). Unless we feel our need of this Divine teaching, we shall not seek it; and unless we seek it, the blessing will never be bestowed. God "fills the hungry with good things, whilst the rich He sends empty away" (Luke i. 53).

The following extract from the writings of Bishop Butler contains suggestions of inestimable value:—"As it is owned the whole scheme of Scripture is not yet understood, so, if it ever comes to be understood before the restitution of all things, and without miraculous interpositions, it must be in the same way as natural knowledge is come at; by the continuance and progress of learning and liberty, and by particular persons attending to, comparing, and pursuing intimations scattered up and down it, which are overlooked and disregarded by the generality of the world. For this is the way in which all im-

provements are made by thoughtful men's tracing on obscure hints, as it were, dropped as by Nature accidentally, or which seem to come into our minds by chance. Nor is it at all incredible that a book which has been so long in the possession of mankind, should contain many truths as yet undiscovered. For all the same phenomena and the same faculties of investigation, from which such great discoveries in natural knowledge have been made in the present and last age, were equally in the possession of mankind several thousand years before. And possibly it might be intended that events as they come to pass should open and ascertain the meaning of several parts of Scripture.—*Butler's Analogy*, Part II. ch. iii. p. 216.

Here we may pertinently inquire, By what means were these "great discoveries in natural knowledge" made? The history of scientific progress is most instructive, and sheds light on the path of those who devote themselves to spiritual science. So long as philosophers occupied their minds in speculations, and in forming theories respecting the laws of Nature and the constitution of the universe, no real knowledge was attained. It was when men like Newton became the disciples of Nature, sat constantly at her feet, listened to her every utterance, and carefully examined her every phenomenon, that

the reign of true science was inaugurated. Theorists became learners; philosophers became children. Renouncing every favourite system, however ancient and however popular, they took their seats on the lowest form in the school of Nature, listened only to her voice, and laboured patiently in the path of progress, by the sure method of observation, experience, and induction.

And if we would attain the knowledge of Divine truth, we must strictly follow this example. We must not come to the Volume of Inspiration with any theory of our own, or with any system of theology, however popular or however venerable. We must study the Word of God under the full conviction that we have everything to learn. We must examine all its statements with the same care as that with which scientific men examine the phenomena of any natural object. Our ears must be open to receive all the lessons of our Divine Instructor. We must be patient and persevering. The ladder which Jacob beheld in his dream, which "was set on the earth, but whose top reached to heaven," above which stood Jehovah himself (Gen. xxviii.), cannot be ascended by any adventurous flight; he who would ascend safely and successfully must begin at the lowest step; must be content to rise step by step; and as he thus steadily perseveres, he will rise higher and

higher above earth, and approach nearer and nearer to heaven, until he enjoys the blessing promised to the pure in heart, of whom it is said "they shall see God" (Matt. v. 8).

The teaching of Scripture is in close harmony with the established principles of modern scientific discovery. Our Lord taught his disciples, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 3); and St. Paul declared, "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. viii. 2). And again, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (1 Cor. iii. 18); *i.e.* let him give up all his preconceived ideas, and submit unreservedly to the teaching of that Holy Gospel which, though esteemed by men to be foolishness, is the grandest manifestation of the wisdom and the power of God.

2. Simplicity. Those who desire to be taught by Christ must come resolved to look to Jesus *only*, and to listen to Jesus *only*. "One is our master (or teacher), even Christ" (Matt. xxiii. 8). Our eye must be single, fixed on Him; our ear must be open, attentive to his voice. To hear his voice, and to follow Him, is the supreme duty, the distinctive characteristic of his sheep (John x.). When all Christians, disregarding

human authority, sit humbly at the feet of Jesus and learn of Him, universal Christian unity will be secured: this is intimated in our Saviour's words, "They shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John x. 16). All other efforts will prove futile.

Simplicity excludes all guile and all double-mindedness. We should approach the Great Teacher in the spirit of that disciple of whom the Lord said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John i. 47.) Coming to Him in this guileless spirit, Nathanael promptly discerned the truth of his Messiahship, and exclaimed, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel!" The wonderful miracles of our Lord failed to convince the hypocritical Jews; but a few words from the Saviour's lips were abundant evidence to the sincere and simple-minded disciple.

3. Earnestness. The truth of Christ is the "one thing needful." Unless we feel this, we shall not seek it with that earnestness which is necessary to secure this supreme good. "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Prov. xxiii. 23). Buy it at any price; part with it for no price, however great. Our Saviour repeatedly enforced this duty—in the parable of the treasure hid in the field, and in that of the pearl of great price; in both which instances the happy finder went and

sold all that he had, that he might secure the treasure. He taught also that we must “seek *first* the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.” Also that “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt. xi. 12). He who can say with the psalmist, “With my *whole heart* have I sought thee,” may feel assured that his prayer will be heard, “O let me not wander from thy commandments” (Ps. cxix. 10).

4. Consistency. We must walk according to the light we have, then more will be granted to us; whereas, if we neglect to improve what we have, this will be taken away. In order to our perfect spiritual health, there must be a correspondence between our intellectual and our moral condition. For, as in our physical frame, if one member of the body suffers, all the members suffer with it, and bodily infirmity results, so in our spiritual constitution, a harmony and a proportion must exist between our intellectual and our moral condition. “Evil men,” says Solomon, “understand not judgment: but they that seek the Lord understand all things” (Prov. xxviii. 5). And a greater than Solomon has said, “If any man will *do* his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John vii. 17). Our moral as well as our intellectual powers must be in a healthy con-

dition, if we would discern and retain spiritual truths, and be filled with the knowledge of his will, "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. i. 9). "For into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter; nor dwell in the body that is subject unto sin" (Wisdom of Solomon i. 4).

We conclude, therefore, that the design of God in allowing difficulties to abound in Holy Scripture is threefold. 1. To stimulate our mental powers; 2. To lead us to cultivate our moral affections; and, 3. To make us earnest in our pursuit of truth, and uniformly obedient to its dictates. All this is in accordance with the principles of his universal government; one prominent law of which manifestly is, that no great good can be secured by man without great labour and great sacrifice.

Such labour will, however, be amply rewarded. No study can be so elevating or so delightful as the study of God's truth; for this reveals to us his character, his government, and his salvation. The superior advantages of this sacred study are beautifully described in the Talmud, where the writer, commenting on the words of Isaiah (lv. 1), "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," says of the Law, "It is deep, like the ocean; the source of life, like water; it was proclaimed amidst thunder and lightning, like water falling tumultuously between preci-

pices; it is quickening to the soul, like water to the thirsty; purifies it, like water to the body; clothes the nakedness of Israel, as water covers the depths of the sea. *The knowledge of the law is obtained by patient and diligent study*, just as water becomes great by the constant flow from small sources. It is sweet to him only who loves it, just as water is agreeable only to the thirsty; it descends only to the humble and modest, just as water comes down from high to low. It is no shame for the great of the earth to apply to it, just as it is no shame for them to assuage their thirst with water. The inexperienced strays and is lost in it, just as he who is ignorant of swimming perishes in the water" (see *British Quarterly*, January, 1872, p. 166).

The difficulties we meet with in Scripture are not, as Dr. Lightfoot says, "to drive us from the holy ground where God shines in majesty in the flaming bush, but to teach us to put off our shoes at the holy ground; not to stand upon our own skill and wisdom, but to strike sail to the Divine wisdom and mysteriousness that shine there; not to dishearten us from the study of the mysteries of God, but to teach us, in all humility, to study them the more."—*Works*, vol. vii. p. 215.

As the man suffering from diseased eyes is incapable of discerning the beauty and magnificence of the most glorious landscape—every

object appearing dim and undefined, and he obtaining only a confused idea of the whole, so the man whose mental vision is diseased cannot discern clearly the beauties of God's Word, or take a distinct and comprehensive view of the whole. Happily there is One who can "open the blind eyes" (Isa. xlii. 7), and who came to "give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke i. 79).



CHAPTER II.

LANGUAGE THE CHIEF SOURCE OF SCRIPTURE DIFFICULTIES.

“The greatest difficulties of the Scripture lie in the language; unlock the language and phrases, and the difficulty is gone.”—LIGHTFOOT.

ALL language, whether oral or written, is but an imperfect medium for conveying thoughts to the mind, or of communicating feelings to the heart. Even when “the whole earth was of one language and one speech,” this, no doubt, was the case. The confusion of tongues, occasioned by the presumptuous attempt at Babel, must greatly have increased the difficulty, as it necessitated the translation of words from one language to another—a work which can seldom be performed with perfect accuracy. This defect is common to all translations; but additional difficulties, arising from various causes, exist in the language of Scripture: these we shall specify, and briefly examine.

1st. Words are variable in their signification. As nearly three hundred years have elapsed since the publication of the English authorised version, great changes have taken place in the meaning of many words ; so much so, that some convey a meaning widely different from that which they had when the translation was made, whilst others express one directly opposite. The word *prevent* affords an illustration of the former change. It originally meant to “come before” (being derived from the Latin *prævenio*); and it is thus used by the psalmist: “In the morning shall my prayer *prevent* Thee” (Ps. lxxxviii. 13); and again, “Thou *preventest* him with the blessings of thy goodness” (Ps. xxi. 3); also in the prayer, “Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favour” (Communion Service). The present meaning of this word is to *hinder*.

The word *let* furnishes an example of change to an opposite signification. It originally meant to *hinder*: “I will work, and who shall *let* it?” says the Almighty (Isa. xliii. 14). The apostle also writes, “He who now *letteth* will *let*, until he be taken out of the way” (2 Thess. ii. 7); and again, “Oftentimes I purposed coming unto you, but was *let* hitherto” (Rom. i. 13). We now use the same word to *allow* or to *permit*, which was formerly used in the sense of to

hinder. These variations often occasion much ambiguity.

The word *flesh* is used in Scripture very frequently, and with a great variety of meaning. Its earliest application is to our human nature—"This is now bone of my bones, and *flesh* of my *flesh*" (Gen. ii. 23). It is sometimes used to express carnal lusts; so the apostle, writing to the Galatians, says, "Now the works of the *flesh* are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness," &c. (v. 19); and in the same Epistle he uses the same word to designate the ceremonial law: "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the *flesh*?" (iii. 3). So, too, he says, "Behold Israel after the *flesh*: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" The word is used in a twofold sense where God promises "I will take away the stony heart out of your *flesh*, and I will give you an heart of *flesh*" (Ezek. xxxvi. 26). In all these cases, and many others, the precise meaning can be determined only by the context.

The word *proper*, applied to the human countenance, expressed great beauty. St. Paul says, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a *proper* child" (Heb. xi. 23). In the Book of Exodus we read, "He was a *goodly* child"

(ii. 2); and Stephen, speaking of him, says, "He was exceeding fair" (Acts vii. 20). Shakspeare represents Desdemona as saying, "This Ludovico is a *proper* man," to which her attendant replies, "A very handsome man" (*Othello*). The word, as now used, means *correct*.

The words *offend* and *offence* have, in modern times, altered their signification. They are now used generally to express anger, or sore displeasure. But when our Bible was translated *offence* meant a stumbling-block; and to *offend* was to place a stumbling-block in the way of another. It was foretold of the Messiah, that whilst He would prove a "sure foundation" to those who believe in Him, He should be "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence to those who stumble at the word, being disobedient" (1 Peter ii. 8). So, when our Saviour warns his disciples, "Take heed that ye offend not one of these little ones," his object is to prevent them from causing the little ones to offend, or to stumble, either by the false doctrine or the bad example of their teachers. So also when He says, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee," He means, if thine eye causes thee to offend; by which we are to understand that our Lord enjoins on us the absolute necessity of renouncing every sinful practice, though this renunciation should prove as painful as the plucking out

of a right eye, and involve a loss equally serious.

The word *quick* is almost universally used in Scripture to express life; it now is used to express prompt action. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram went “down *quick*” (*i.e.* alive) “into the pit” (Num. xvi. 30). In reference to their punishment, the psalmist says of his enemies, “Let them go down *quick* into hell” (Ps. lv. 15). Boothroyd renders the verse as a prediction rather than an imprecation:—

“Death shall suddenly seize them;
Alive shall they go down to hades;
For great wickedness is in their dwellings.”

In Psalm cxxiii. the Church gives thanks that the malicious designs of her enemies had been frustrated: “Then had they swallowed us up *quick* ;” *i.e.* alive.

In this sense the word is used in the New Testament: “Who shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the *quick* and the dead” (1 Peter iv. 5).

2nd. The Hebrew idioms require especial attention. Every language has its peculiar idioms. The importance of those in the Hebrew is that they greatly affect our apprehension of the doctrines taught by the inspired writers. Igno-

rance of these peculiar modes of expression has been a fruitful source of error. This will be shown in a subsequent chapter devoted to this subject (see chap. v.).

3rd. The Oriental style of the Bible multiplies, to the English reader, the difficulties arising from its language; and these difficulties are aggravated by its being of Jewish origin. The style prevalent in Eastern nations is highly figurative, and sounds very extravagant in European ears. Their figures are taken from the local scenery, from their habits and customs (some of which are very peculiar), from their climate, from their religious institutions, &c. Without some knowledge of these, the sacred Scriptures cannot be understood. For example, the well-known saying, "No man putteth new wine into old bottles," is untrue in this country, but strictly true and appropriate where, instead of glass, skins are used for preserving wine. Again, the words of David, "My *tears* have been my *meat* day and night," &c., appear incongruous to a people accustomed to live on solid food; but when we learn that the food of Orientals is chiefly liquid, consisting largely of milk and of pottage (or broth), the propriety of the figure is obvious.

Bishop Lowth, in his "Lectures on Hebrew Poetry," pointedly remarks, "It is not enough to be acquainted with the language of this people,

their manners, discipline, rites, and ceremonies; we must even investigate their inmost sentiments, the manner and connection of their thoughts; in one word, we must endeavour, as much as possible, to read Hebrew as the Hebrews would have read it. . . . He who would perceive and feel the peculiar and interior elegancies of Hebrew poetry must imagine himself exactly situated as the persons for whom it was written, or even as the writers themselves; he must not attend to the ideas which, on a cursory reading, would obtrude upon his mind; he is to feel them as a Hebrew, hearing or delivering the same words, at the same time, and in the same country.”—*Lecture V.*

What the Bishop asserts, in reference to Hebrew poetry, is applicable in a measure to all other parts of Scripture. The value of his suggestions will be appreciated the most highly by those who best succeed in acting upon them.

4th. The great number and varied qualifications of the sacred writers, the variety of their subjects, and the widely different periods in which the several books were composed must be kept in mind by those who would thoroughly understand the Scriptures.

(a) Some of the writers were trained in courts, as Isaiah; others were called from farm-labour,

as Amos. The style of each is characterized by his distinctive antecedents. Isaiah is refined and magnificent in all his figures, and is unsurpassed in sublimity. The illustrations of Amos are taken chiefly from agricultural life, and are homely, though striking. Moses spent his first forty years in a court, where he became "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians;" his next forty years were spent in the desert of Midian, engaged in tending sheep. His writings combine exquisite simplicity with wonderful grandeur. This is the more remarkable as the writings of Moses are by far the most ancient extant. The great Hebrew lawgiver wrote about one thousand years before the great Grecian historian, Herodotus, "the father of history." The fact that his works have been thus preserved to mankind warrants the inference that He who inspired his gifted servant to write has, by his special providence, conserved his writings for the three thousand five hundred years which have elapsed since he wrote. As to the literary character of his works, the opinion of one of our most eminent and polished writers may be quoted. The late Dr. Milman, commenting on the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, says, "The sublimity of his denunciations surpasses anything in the oratory or the poetry of the whole world. Nature is exhausted in furnishing terrific images;

nothing, excepting the real horrors of the Jewish history, the miseries of their sieges, the cruelty, the contempt, the oppressions, the persecutions, which, for ages, this scattered, and despised, and detested nation have endured, can approach the tremendous maledictions which warned them against the violation of the law.”—(*Milman’s History of the Jews*, vol. i. p. 211.) These terrible denunciations were uttered by “the man Moses, very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth” (Num. xii. 3), and they were addressed to the people whom he loved so intensely, that he was willing to sacrifice his very being to secure their welfare (Exod. xxxii. 32).

(b) The variety of subjects dealt with in the Bible necessitated a corresponding variety in style. We have the style of history, and the style of poetry; the didactic style, and the ceremonial style; the epistolary style, and the prophetic style; each has its peculiarities. To interpret the language of poetry as we do that of plain prose will often convert the greatest beauty into the greatest absurdity. Take one example: Moses, speaking of Mount Sinai at the giving of the law, says, “The whole mountain quaked greatly” (Exod. xix. 18). The prophet Habakkuk, in his sublime ode, referring to the same event, says, “The moun-

tains saw thee—they trembled!” (chap. iii. 10.) Read as poetry, nothing could be more sublime; read as prose, nothing could be more absurd.

This subject will be more fully treated in a subsequent chapter (see chap. vii. on Poetry).

(c). The various periods of Jewish history in which the inspired penmen wrote ought to be considered and studied carefully. From the time that Moses wrote, in the desert of Midian, to the time that St. John wrote in the Isle of Patmos, a period of about sixteen hundred years must have elapsed. The nation was sometimes in the height of prosperity; at others, in the depth of adversity: sometimes triumphing over surrounding nations; at others, led captive into heathen lands. The history of a people will always leave its impress on their literature. Hence the importance of ascertaining, as far as possible, the peculiar circumstances which prompted David and others to write their Psalms, and the prophets to utter their predictions. In the prosperous times of David and Solomon, the Hebrew poets delight to paint in glowing colours the glories of Messiah's reign: their strains express joy and triumph (see Ps. xcvi.—c.) During the Babylonian captivity the exulting Ode is changed for the mournful Dirge, full of pathos and heartfelt grief (see Ps. lxxiv., xciv., and cii.). Fully to understand the prophetic writings, they must be

studied in connection with the history of the Hebrew nation at the time, and the occasion which called them forth.*

It is a marvellous fact, that notwithstanding the wide intervals of time in which the several books of the Bible were composed, and the variety of authors by whom they were penned, a striking unity of purpose pervades the Sacred Volume from the beginning to the end. The creation of all things, visible and invisible, by the one living and true God—the fall of man through disobedience to his Maker—redemption through the promised Saviour—the fearful consequences of transgression—the peace and blessedness resulting from holy obedience—and the final “restitution of all things,” through Him who is both the Son of God and the Son of man; all these are consistently maintained by numerous authors, writing during a period of more than fifteen hundred years. Had the Bible, like the Koran, been the work of one man, the whole volume composed within a few years, this unity and consistency would not be surprising. As it is, these characteristics can be accounted for only by ascribing the work to one Divine Author, by whom “holy men of God” were inspired to

* Lightfoot’s “Harmony,” and Townsend’s “Bible chronologically arranged,” are, in this respect, invaluable helps to the Scripture student.

speak and to write “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter i. 21).

On no other ground can we account for the marvellous influence that this book has had on the history of the world. Composed by Jews, a peculiar people—peculiar in their social habits, and separated from the rest of mankind by their political and religious constitution—despising all the rest of mankind, and being themselves despised by all—asserting that God had made the world only for his chosen people, and that “all other that come from Adam are nothing, and like unto spittle” (2 Esdras vi. 55, 56), whilst they describe themselves as “the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold” (Lam. iv. 2)—that such a people should have produced a book, the truths of which are giving life to the world, and, wherever it is cordially received, making “the nations to be glad and sing for joy” (Ps. lxxvii.), proves unquestionably that He “who formed the spirit of man within him,” and knows his spiritual cravings, has provided for these, as well as for his bodily necessities.

“It is this universal applicability of Scripture,” says the Rev. F. W. Robertson, “which has made the influence of the Bible universal. This book has held spell-bound the hearts of nations, in a way in which no single book has held them before. Remember, too, in order to enhance the

marvellousness of this, that the nation from which it emanated was a despised people. For the last eighteen hundred years the Jews have been proverbially a byword and a reproach. But that contempt for Israel is nothing new to the world ; for before even the Roman despised them, the Assyrian and the Egyptian regarded them with scorn. Yet the words which came from Israel's prophets have been the life-blood of the world's devotions, and the teachers, the psalmists, the prophets, and the lawgivers of this despised nation spoke out truths which have struck the key-note of the heart of man ; and this, not because they were Jewish, but because they were of universal application."

—(*Sermon on Inspiration.*) He adds, "The very translation of it has fixed language and settled the idiom of speech. Germany and England speak as they speak because the Bible was translated." To these two European nations may be added the vast continent of North America, together with Australia and other British colonies. Wherever the Anglo-Saxon race go, with their Bibles in their hands, and in their hearts, "the wilderness and the solitary place are made glad ; and the desert rejoices, and blossoms like the rose" (Isa. xxxv. 1).

The wisdom and the goodness of God in choosing an Oriental style and language as the medium of communicating his will to mankind are ob-

vious. Asia contains about two-thirds of the population of our globe. The highly figurative and symbolical language of Scripture, so difficult to Europeans, is the very style in which Eastern nations most delight. It is the language in which they most naturally clothe their thoughts. The severe simplicity with which we are accustomed to clothe truth would be frigid and repulsive to them: the metaphors, the dark sayings, and the parables of Scripture arouse their attention and fascinate their minds. This florid style (like the gaudy plumage of their birds) seems most natural to the soil. Missionaries who have laboured among Asiatic nations attest this important fact. Those portions of the Bible which cause us most perplexity are to them the most fascinating.

The Divine wisdom and goodness are further exemplified in having chosen the Jewish people to write and to preserve the Scriptures of Truth. For we look forward to the time when "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. xi. 26). Through their fall, salvation came to the Gentiles; and the apostle argues, "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (ver. 12.) The Jewish people, converted to the faith of Christ, may prove the most efficient preachers of the Gospel, and the most able expositors of the saving truths penned

by their forefathers. Dispersed as they are amongst all the nations of the earth—yet preserved distinct from all—they may be made “the ambassadors of Christ” to the ends of the earth. Their former captivity in Babylon and their dispersion among the nations were overruled for good, and prepared the way for the proclamation of the Gospel. For the Temple having been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the ceremonial services were, for many years, necessarily discontinued. But those who feared the Lord gathered together in small companies, even in a heathen land, to worship Him, and to listen to the reading of his Word. This necessitated places for them to meet in; these places for meeting were called synagogues; and on the return of the Jews from Babylon, that truly great man, Ezra, established them throughout the land, as the best antidote to that idolatry which had been the cause of their captivity and the desolation of their city. Hence, wherever the apostles went, they found synagogues in all the great towns and cities; and in these they preached the Christ, both to the Jews and also to the Greeks. It has been well remarked that “the dispersion of the Jews of old was like casting the seed of true religion abroad in the earth: and their dispersion at present may be equally beneficial in its consequences to the world.” —*Dr. J. Smith.*

In further examining the peculiarities of Scripture language, we shall observe the following order :—

1st. Anthropomorphic and anthropopathic expressions ; the former describing God as possessing and exercising the bodily faculties of man, the latter describing the Infinite Spirit as possessing the intellectual powers, and influenced by the moral feelings and passions of man.

2nd. Symbolical language ; or the language of prophecy.

3rd. Idioms.

4th. Figurative language. Dark sayings, proverbs, parables, and hyperboles.

6th. Poetical language.

With the following words of Archbishop Whately, we close this chapter :—“ There is a maxim relative to the right interpretation of Scripture, so obvious when stated, that it seems strange it should be so often overlooked ; viz., to consider *in what sense the words were understood by the generality of the persons they were addressed to* ; and to keep in mind that the *presumption* is in favour of that, as the true sense, unless reasons to the contrary appear.

“ Some are accustomed to consider what sense such and such words can be *brought to bear* ; or how *we* should be most naturally inclined to

understand them. But it is evident that the point we have to consider—if we would understand aright what it is that God did design to reveal—is the sense which the very hearers of Christ and his apostles did *actually* attach to their words.”—*The Kingdom of Christ*, p. 10.



CHAPTER III.

PART I.—ANTHROPOMORPHIC AND ANTHROPOPATHIC EXPRESSIONS.

“ To familiarise, to endear the thought of God, without degrading the conception ; to bring Him within the sphere of human affections, without impairing his majesty, is the triumph of the Bible.”—HENRY ROGERS.

“ God speaks to the heart of man in the language of its own emotions.”—IBID.

SECTION I.—ANTHROPOMORPHIC EXPRESSIONS.

ALTHOUGH we may not be familiar with these terms, we are all perfectly familiar with the ideas they represent. Anthropomorphic expressions are those which attribute to the Creator the bodily faculties of man ; and anthropopathic are those which attribute to the Infinite Spirit the mental affections and passions of man. In the one case God is spoken of as having eyes, as inclining his ear, as stretching forth his arm, as uttering his voice, and sometimes as shouting (Jer. xxv. 30), or blowing a trumpet (Zech. ix.

14), also as riding on a cherub, and flying upon the wings of the wind (Ps. xviii. 10). In the other case He is represented as being jealous, as hating, as repenting, as taking vengeance, &c.

We all know that such expressions are not strictly applicable to the Divine Being. "God is a Spirit." He "dwells in the light, which no man can approach unto." His essence "no man hath seen, or can see." By what process, then, can the knowledge of this spiritual and incomprehensible Being be conveyed to the human understanding? Only by transferring to Him, in our imagination, some of those faculties, whether bodily or mental, which we ourselves possess, and enlarging our conceptions of them indefinitely. Were there nothing Divine in man, he could not possibly rise to the knowledge of Deity. It has been well remarked, "Only through man can God be known; only through a perfect Man, perfectly revealed."—(*Robertson's Life*, vol. ii. p. 169.) No idea of God can be conveyed to any of the merely animal creation. It is because man was "created in the image of God" that he is capable, when "renewed in the spirit of his mind," of knowing, of loving, and of worshipping his Creator, and of bearing his Divine image. Some elements of affinity must exist between the Infinite Spirit and his intelligent and moral creatures. Accordingly, when the

Scriptures would impress us with the infinite knowledge of God, they declare that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. xv. 3). Not that the uncreated Spirit has eyes, or any other bodily organ; but, as we acquire our limited knowledge chiefly through the eye, the idea of Omniscience (so far as we are able to comprehend it) is conveyed to us by the statement that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place."

By similar means, some idea of Divine Omnipotence is conveyed to the human mind. As we exert our limited powers chiefly by the hand, so God is represented as accomplishing his mighty works through the instrumentality of the same organ. Thus the psalmist says, "His *hands* formed the dry land" (Ps. xcv. 5). With great sublimity, the Omnipotent One is represented as having "measured the waters in the hollow of his *hand*, and meted out heaven with a span" (Isa. xl. 12). The heavens are described as being "the work of his *fingers*" (Ps. viii. 3). These sublime utterances are eminently calculated to inspire us with confidence; we know that the hand which formed the dry land, which measures the waters of the deep, that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, is the same hand which secures the salvation of all Christ's followers; for He who is the faithful and true witness has

affirmed of them, "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my *hand*" (John x. 28).

The omnipresence of God is an attribute more incomprehensible to our limited faculties than either his omniscience or his omnipotence. Each individual man occupies a certain limited space in the world: in this space, and this only, can he exercise his powers. Adequately to grasp the idea of a Being present everywhere and acting throughout the universe is beyond the capacity of any finite mind; for only the Infinite can comprehend infinity. Hence the prevalence amongst the heathen of local deities; gods of the hills, gods of the valleys, &c. But the Almighty demands, "Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I *fill* heaven and earth? saith the Lord" (Jer. xxiii. 23, 24). "In Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28). However inadequate our notion of God's omnipresence may be, it is enough for all practical purposes; for if we carefully improve the limited knowledge we have of this Divine attribute, we may, like the psalmist, "set the Lord always before us," and feel that, "because He is at our right hand, we shall not be moved" (Ps. xvi. 8). The grandest discourse on this grandest of sub-

jects is to be found in the 139th Psalm, and is well worthy of prayerful study.

Not only are the bodily faculties of man attributed to the Almighty, but sometimes those of the inferior creation. Dr. J. Smith, in his "Summary View of the Prophets," remarks, "The Scriptures, having occasion to speak of divine and spiritual matters, could do it only by terms borrowed from sensible and material objects. Hence it is that the sentiments, actions, and corporeal parts, not only of man, but also of inferior creatures, are ascribed to God himself; it being impossible for us to form any conception of his pure essence and incomprehensible attributes."

In illustration of these remarks, the following texts may be quoted :—

"He shall cover thee with his feathers;

And under his wings shalt thou trust" (Ps. xci. 4);

by which expressive imagery we are taught that, as the young of birds find security and comfort under the shelter of their mother's wings, so God's children may always find safety and comfort by flying to the infinite goodness and the almighty power of their heavenly Father (see Ps. lvii. 1).

The following is another illustration of a different character :—

"The Lord shall roar out of Zion,

And utter His voice from Jerusalem" (Joel iii. 16).

The voice of God's judgments, being very terrible, is fitly compared to the roaring of a lion. The words of the psalmist are addressed to his people, and are tenderly assuring. Those of the prophet are addressed to God's enemies, and are terribly alarming.

Even inanimate matter is frequently chosen to illustrate the Divine perfections. Thus we read that "the Lord God is a *sun* and a *shield*" (Ps. lxxxiv. 11), giving light to guide those who desire to walk in his light, and protection to those who confide in Him. "The Lord is good, a *stronghold* in the day of trouble" (Nahum i. 7). He is repeatedly called a *rock*, a *fortress*, a *high tower*; all expressions intended to assure us of the safety of those who confide in his protection.

When we read the declaration of God, "There" (in the valley of Jehoshaphat) "will I *sit* to judge all the heathen round about" (Joel iii. 12), we are not to imagine such a posture to be assumed by the Almighty; the idea conveyed is, that as an earthly ruler in pronouncing judgment *sits*, so the unseen "Judge of all the earth" will make known his judgments, and execute them.

Where we read, "The Lord smelled a sweet savour" (Gen. viii. 21), on the occasion of Noah offering his sacrifice, we are to understand this statement merely as expressing the Divine approval of the patriarch's faith and obedience. Dr. Booth-

royd translates the text, "Jehovah accepted the offerings," and he adds, in a note, "This is the sense of the idiomatical phrase, '*Jehovah smelled a sweet savour.*' Onkelos has given the meaning, 'Jehovah accepted with pleasure his offering.' " The same idea is expressed in other words, where we read, "The Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering" (Gen. iv. 4). And when the apostle exhorts Christians to "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. v. 2), he adopts the language applied to Noah's sacrifice; although, in the mode of our Saviour's death, the circumstances were not such as would make the same terms strictly appropriate. The apostle's adaptation of these words is noticeable as an example of the practice so frequently adopted by the New Testament writers, of using the language of the former dispensation.

In conveying to us the knowledge of what God does, as well as what He is, the like modes of expression are adopted by the sacred writers. As by his natural faculties, bodily and mental, man, guided by revelation, attains to some knowledge of the Divine perfections, so from his own works and actions he forms his notions of the works and acts of his Maker; and the language ordinarily used to record the acts of man is chosen

in the Bible to record the actions of God. By no other imaginable means could the knowledge of the unseen and eternal One, and of his government, be conveyed to the human mind, especially during the childhood of the world. The Bible abounds with instances in which the Divine Being is described as acting like a human being; and unless a wise and intelligent discrimination be exercised in explaining these statements, notions derogatory to the Divine Majesty will be adopted.

For example, we read that when the city and tower of Babel were in course of erection, "the Lord *came down* to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded" (Gen. xi. 5). Again, when the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah had culminated, God is represented as saying, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will *go down* now, and will see if they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know" (Gen. xviii. 20, 21). To interpret this language literally would be absurd. God, who is omnipresent, cannot go from place to place; He who is omniscient can have nothing added to his knowledge. But this mode of describing the acts of the Incomprehensible One is adapted to human weakness. It is designed to make us feel that He is ever present with us; that He has the most per-

fect knowledge of all his intelligent creatures; and that He marks all their conduct, in order that He may exercise a righteous judgment. This style of instruction is kindly adapted to our limited faculties and powers; for as we ourselves can acquire knowledge only by personal investigation, and can exercise our powers only where we are actually present, the Infinite Creator, in order vividly to impress us with the conviction that He knows us intimately, and that He is ever present with us, adapts to our feeble conceptions that mode of teaching which is best calculated to instruct us in the knowledge of Himself and of his ways.

Those numerous texts, therefore, which describe God as “going down,” or as “rising up,” or as “resting,” or as “coming forth out of his place,” together with those which invoke Him, “O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, *show thyself*” (Ps. xciv. 1), and many which speak of the “coming of the Lord,” are to be interpreted on this principle, that human faculties are attributed to the Creator, in order that some knowledge of Him may be communicated to his intelligent creature, man.

There can be no doubt that these means were the best adapted to secure the end. Men are but slightly influenced by that which is unseen and spiritual. The mere assertion of the attributes of the invisible God would have had little or no

power over the conduct of men. Engrossed with external objects, they profanely ask, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge with the Most High?" (Ps. lxxiii. 11). Or, blinded by presumption, they assert, "The Lord will not see, neither will the God of Jacob regard" (Ps. xciv. 7). To correct this atheistic spirit, and at the same time to correct the tendency to idolatry, is one primary object of revelation, which directs us to a personal God, one "whom no man hath seen, or can see," but who has graciously revealed himself to his creature man, by instituting analogies between the human nature and the Divine, and thus through ages preparing his sinful creatures for the time when God should be "manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 16), and when they might behold "the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ," and be changed "into the same image by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. iii. 18; iv. 6).

SECTION II.—ANTHROPOPATHIC EXPRESSIONS.

We have already stated that this term is used to designate the custom (so frequent in Scripture) of representing the Infinite Creator as acting under the influence of human affections and human passions. Very early in sacred history (namely, one hundred and twenty years before the Deluge), we read, "It REPENTED the Lord that

He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at his heart " (Gen. vi. 6). Now, it is obvious that, as "God is not a man, that He should lie," so neither is He "the Son of man, that He should repent" (Num. xxiii. 19). These expressions, therefore, cannot be interpreted literally. They merely intimate that God would act towards the ungodly world as a man who repents (*i.e.* undergoes a change of mind) would act towards an object which he once regarded with delight, but now views with disgust. On the morning of creation, "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. i. 31). But when sin entered the world, this fair prospect was blighted. One transgression, committed in Eden, sadly illustrates the truth that "wickedness burneth as a fire" (Isa. ix. 18), and reminds us also of the apostle's words, "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (James iii. 5.) After the lapse of about fifteen centuries, we are told that "God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth" (Gen. vi. 12). Again, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. vi. 5). The infinitely pure and holy God, who had created man in his own

image, and who had pronounced all that He had made "very good," could not behold this demoralised condition of the world otherwise than with abhorrence. On the morning of creation He beheld the work of his own hands, and rejoiced: now He beheld the work of the great enemy of God and man; and in consequence we read, "it repented the Lord that He had made man upon the earth, and it grieved Him at his heart." By which expressions the sacred writers would assure us of God's resolution to act towards the world which He had created to manifest his glory, as a man whose mind is alienated from an object in which he once delighted, but which now grieves him at his heart. What He had created, He would "utterly destroy."

Repentance, when attributed to "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James i. 17), can mean nothing but a change of purpose resulting from the altered circumstances of those who are the occasion of it. When a nation repents of its sins, God repents of the evil which He threatened to do to it (see Jer. xviii.). This is strikingly illustrated in the history of Nineveh. The change is in the minds of the people who repent when warned of God's judgments. The unchangeableness of the Divine perfections necessitates a corresponding change of feeling and of conduct

on his part. Were He to feel and to act towards the impenitent and the contrite alike, He would not be the Unchangeable One. His promises and his threatenings are made, not to certain persons, but to certain characters; the former are the portion of his obedient children; the latter, the doom of the impenitent and rebellious—"the children of wrath" (Eph. ii. 3).

The non-execution of God's threatenings, in answer to the intercessions of his servants, is described as the Lord repenting. When, in the time of Amos, God threatened the land with the plague of locusts, by the earnest and pathetic entreaty of the prophet, the calamity was averted; and this is expressed by the sacred writers, "The Lord repented for this: It shall not be, saith the Lord" (Amos vii. 2, 3). So, too, when "the Lord God called to contend by fire" (the symbol of destructive judgments), the prophet again interceded, and again "the Lord repented of this," and declared, "This also shall not be, saith the Lord God" (ver. 4, 6).

Speaking, as with an earthly father's love to his disobedient and impenitent children, the Almighty says by his prophet, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? Mine heart is turned within me; my *repentings* are kindled together" (Hosea xi. 8). On these words Lowth remarks, "Thus

God's compassion towards sinners is elsewhere expressed by the sounding or yearning of his bowels (Isa. lxiii. 15, and Jer. xxxi. 20), a metaphor taken from the natural affection which parents have for their children."—(*Lowth on Hosea.*) In reading such language applied to the Almighty it is necessary to keep in mind that it is strictly metaphorical, and can have no literal application to the Infinite Spirit; it only indicates his feelings towards us of paternal love.

This relationship of "Father," in which the Creator has revealed himself to mankind, is eminently anthropopathic. We can conceive nothing more calculated to inspire the children of men with confidence than the assurance that God regards us as his children. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." It was the thought of this relationship that softened with penitence the miserable prodigal, and prompted him to exclaim, "I will arise, and go to my father" (Luke xv.).

The words of God by the prophet Jeremiah, "Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted will I pluck up, even this whole land" (Jer. xlv. 4), are equivalent in meaning to the words of the sacred historian, "It repented the Lord that He

had made man, and it grieved Him at his heart." In the one case Moses records God's determination to destroy the world because "all flesh had made its way corrupt," and in the other the prophet announces the Divine purpose to destroy Jerusalem, the city of God, for its unfaithfulness, idolatry, and impenitence.

When we read (as in Nahum i. 2), "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious," we are to understand that the Almighty Judge, guided by infinite mercy, justice, and wisdom, will act towards impenitent sinners as a human being, under the impulse of fury and revenge, would act towards his enemies; *i.e.* He will punish them fearfully. Yet these Divine judgments are designed in mercy. The above occasion on which God is represented as being "jealous and furious" was the announcement of his judgments against Nineveh, the very city which, some years previously, had been spared on its repentance, and concerning which the Lord had said to the selfish Jonah, "Thou hadst pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand

and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (Jonah iv. 10, 11).

God is sometimes represented in Scripture as *laughing*. Of the kings and rulers hostile to the Messiah's kingdom, it is said—

“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh;
Jehovah shall have them in derision” (Ps. ii. 4);

i.e. as a mighty man would regard the hostile threats of a weak and insignificant foe, so the Almighty would regard the hostility of those heathen who raged, and the people who imagined a vain thing; who presumptuously exclaimed—

“Let us break their bands asunder,
And cast away their cords from us.”

So, too, when we read in Prov. i. 24, 26—

“Because I have called, and ye refused;
I have stretched out my hand, but no man regarded;
I also will *laugh* at your calamity;
I will mock when your fear cometh;”

these expressions are anthropopathic, and we are to understand by them that those who refuse to regard God's gracious invitations will receive no help from Him in the day of their calamity; as men rejoice in the distresses of their foes, and mock them, but render them no assistance.

When the Almighty threatens to execute on the enemies and oppressors of Israel his most severe judgments, He uses this remarkable expression, "My fury shall come up in my face" (Ezek. xxxviii. 18). Compare this with Dan. iii. 19—"Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," and we get a vivid idea of the Divine declaration, "My fury shall come up in my face." Not that God is agitated by the human passion of fury, or that He manifests it as an earthly monarch would, by a change of countenance; but we are thus taught that He would deal with his people's enemies as an earthly king would with his foes, when under the influence of the most furious resentment. "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!"



CHAPTER III.—*continued.*

PART II.—THE VISITING—THE APPEARING—THE COMING OF THE LORD.

THE anthropomorphic style of expression is employed in Scripture to describe any manifestation of Divine power, whether ordinary or special, whether physical or spiritual. The ordinary operations of God's providence are thus pictured before us: "Thou *visitest* the earth, and waterest it" (Ps. lxxv. 9). Naomi, in the country of Moab, "heard how the Lord had *visited* his people in giving them bread" (Ruth i. 6). Special mercies are spoken of as *visits* from God. So Joseph, dying, assured his brethren of their deliverance from Egypt—"God will surely *visit* you, and bring you out of this land" (Gen. l. 24). The words of Moses, when appointed by God to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage, seem to refer to this prophecy of Joseph: "Say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, hath appeared

unto me, saying, "I have *surely visited* you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt" (Exod. iii. 16). As the deliverance from Egypt was foretold as the Lord *visiting* his people, so the deliverance from Babylon was foretold in the same terms: "For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I *will visit you*, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place" (Jer. xxix. 10). And Zacharias, in his thanksgiving ode, seems to have regard to the words of Joseph, which were also used by Moses in the name of God himself—

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
For He hath *visited* and redeemed his people"
(Luke i. 68).

The preaching of the Gospel to the Gentile world is thus represented by St. James: "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did *visit* the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name" (Acts xv. 14). This *visit* consisted in the mission of St. Peter to Cornelius and his friends at Cæsarea (Acts x.).

Special judgments, as well as special mercies, are described as *visits* from God. The destruction of Edom is thus foretold: "I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time that I will *visit* him" (Jer. xlix. 8). The destruction of

Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar is thus referred to: "At the time that I *visit* them they shall be cast down, saith the Lord" (Jer. vi. 15); and the subsequent destruction of Babylon is foretold in similar language: "I will *visit* the world" (*i.e.* the Babylonian world) "for its evil" (Isa. xiii. 11, Lowth's version). God *visited* Edom and Jerusalem by employing Nebuchadnezzar as the executioner of his judgments. He *visited* Babylon when He raised up Cyrus, and went before him, as foretold (Isa. xlv. 1, 2), and by his agency fulfilled his word, "I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron."

Great manifestations of Divine power are also frequently described as God *appearing* to his people. One of the earliest records of this expression is where Moses says to the Israelites, "To-day the Lord will *appear* unto you" (Lev. ix. 4). How this was fulfilled is stated in the twenty-fourth verse—"And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed on the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces." In 1 Sam. iii. 21 we read, "And the Lord *appeared* again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord." The *appearing* in this case consisted in the communications made to the prophet. In Ps. cii. (written towards the close of the captivity in

Babylon) the inspired psalmist says, "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall *appear* in his glory;" and he describes how that glory would be manifested: "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" (Ps. cii. 16, 17). The glory, then, in which He *appeared* was the glory of Divine compassion and love.

The prophet Isaiah thus comforts the afflicted servants of God: "Hear ye the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but He shall *appear* to your joy, and they shall be ashamed" (Isa. lxvi. 5). Lowth thus paraphrases this passage: "Hearken to this, you *Jews*, who embraced the Gospel upon the preaching of Christ and the apostles: Your brethren have hated you for my sake, and cast you out of their synagogues, and in derision called upon God to do some extraordinary thing in your behalf: but God's providence, at the destruction of Jerusalem, shall interpose visibly for your deliverance, and leave them to perish in their city. This was remarkably verified when the *Christians* had a Divine warning to leave the city, and thereupon retired to Pella, and escaped the common destruction." In this way "the Lord *appeared* to their joy;" *i.e.* He manifested his power in their deliverance

as plainly as if He had been seen personally performing it; whilst He executed righteous judgment on their persecutors.

Our Lord, when nigh to Jerusalem, “spake a parable, because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately *appear*” (Luke xix. 11). By the kingdom of God the Jews understood the reign of their Messiah, and this they expected would be a temporal kingdom. To correct this notion, the Lord had before told them, when demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come, “the kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke xvii. 20, 21). The Divine power establishing his kingdom was manifest, but not to the eye of sense; it could be seen only by those who had spiritual discernment, by such as Barnabas, who, when he came to Antioch, “and had *seen* the grace of God, was glad” (Acts xi. 23). He saw the mighty power of God manifested in the graces of the converts; and this power, sometimes described as God *visiting* his people, is at other times described as his *appearing* to them. It can be discerned only by those whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit of God.

In this sense, probably, we are to understand those passages in the New Testament which speak of the “*appearing* of the Lord.” What

an eminent writer has said respecting "the *coming* of the Lord" may be said with equal propriety of his *appearing*. "The second advent of Christ is supposed by some to mean an appearance of Jesus in the flesh, to reign and triumph visibly. Others, who feel that a visual perception of his form would be only a small blessing, and that the highest and truest Presence is always spiritual, and realised by the spirit, believe that his advent will be a coming in power."—*Robertson's Sermons*, vol. i. p. 155.

The Lord visiting, the Lord appearing, and the Lord coming are different expressions used to denote any extraordinary manifestation of Divine power. As Lowth remarks, commenting on the words "For, behold, the Lord *cometh forth* out of his place, and will *come down*, and tread upon the high places of the earth" (Micah i. 3), "God is described as coming from heaven to judgment, because of the visible effects of his power upon earth." The power is put forth, but the Divine agent is unseen; the results only are visible.

Dr. Boothroyd, in a note on Hab. iii. 3—"God came from Teman"—says, "God's coming denotes the manifestation of himself, the display of his power." This phraseology, "the coming of the Lord," is much more frequently used to describe the manifestation of Divine power than

either his *visiting* or his *appearing*. The eminent author quoted above, in a sermon entitled “Waiting for the Second Advent,” says—

“There are many comings of Christ. Christ came in the flesh, as a Mediatorial Presence; Christ came at the destruction of Jerusalem; Christ came as a Spiritual Presence when the Holy Ghost was given.

“Christ comes now, in every signal manifestation of redeeming power.

“Any great reformation of morals and religion is a coming of Christ.

“A great revolution, like a thunderstorm, violently sweeping the evil away, to make way for the good, is a coming of Christ.

“Christ will come at the end of the world, when the spirit of all these comings will be concentrated.

“Thus we may understand in what way Christ is ever coming and ever near; why it was that St. James said ‘Stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh,’ and ‘Behold, the Judge standeth before the door;’ and we shall also understand how it was that the early Church was not deceived in expecting Christ in their own day. He *did* come, though not in the way they expected.”—*Robertson’s Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 73.

The various comings of the Lord mentioned in Scripture as manifestations of Divine power may

with propriety and advantage be classified under four heads :—

1st. His coming in mighty power, to execute judgment.

2nd. His coming in great spiritual power, to establish his kingdom.

3rd. His coming to receive believers to Himself.

4th. His coming to raise the dead, and to judge the world in righteousness.

Each of these manifestations of the Divine power is termed “the coming of the Lord,” not because He is visibly present, but because the effects of his power are as manifest to men as if He had been seen accomplishing them in person. We shall consider each separately.

In doing this, let us endeavour to come with unbiassed minds to the teaching of Scripture. Accurately to ascertain the meaning of any of its statements, we must inquire in what sense they were designed to be understood by those to whom they were originally addressed. We may assume that the language employed by Jews in addressing Jews would be that with which both teacher and taught were most familiar, and would be marked by its peculiarities in form, idiom, and style ; influenced also by the habits and modes of thought common amongst those by whom it was spoken.

It is very evident that expressions and figures

of speech frequently employed in the Old Testament are freely adopted in the New, and that their meaning is substantially the same, but conveyed with clearer light, and with fuller signification. When, therefore, we want to ascertain the meaning of New Testament terms or figures, the safest process is to examine their use as recorded in the Old, and thus, as it were, to trace them to their root; for we shall find that Jewish thought and Jewish modes of speech have been moulded chiefly by their earliest records, those found in the writings of their great Lawgiver. Our Lord and his apostles spoke the language of the prophets; and these spoke the language of Moses and of David.

SECTION I.—THE COMING OF THE LORD IN MIGHTY POWER TO EXECUTE JUDGMENT.

“Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all,” &c.—JUDE 14, 15.

This appears to be the first recorded occasion on which the phrase “the Lord cometh” was used; at least, so far as the Scriptures testify. It was a prophecy uttered by “Enoch, the seventh from Adam,” and was delivered, probably, about the year A.M. 1000. It is not recorded in the Book of Genesis, but quoted in an apostolic epistle from an apocryphal book, with which those to whom St. Jude wrote were,

no doubt, familiar. This is the most ancient prophecy uttered by any inspired man: if, therefore, we can ascertain the meaning of the phrase on this the first occasion of its use, we shall be aided to understand its meaning on every subsequent occasion on which "the coming of the Lord" is mentioned.

Whatever ulterior meaning this prophecy may have had, no one will doubt that when uttered by the patriarch, its immediate reference was to the approaching destruction of all flesh by the Deluge. This fearful calamity was not brought upon a corrupt world without ample warning. Endued by God with the spirit of prophecy, Enoch foretold the coming destruction some centuries before it occurred. It was, no doubt, in order that the judgment foretold should be kept in remembrance after his removal from earth that he named his son METHUSELAH: which name, according to Bochart, signifies "when he is dead, a flood cometh." Methuselah died in the first month of the year of the Deluge, and Noah entered the ark on the second. For the long period, therefore, of eight or nine centuries, the name of Enoch's son served to remind all men of "the coming of the Lord," even after the prophet himself had been taken away from the evil to come; whilst, by the miraculous translation of Enoch without seeing death, God

gave the strongest testimony to the truth of his prediction, and to the certainty of its fulfilment.

But prophecy was not the only agency employed by the God of infinite mercy to reform his rebellious creatures, and thus to avert, as subsequently in the case of Nineveh, the threatened judgment. When the warning voice of Enoch could no longer be heard, Noah was raised up "a preacher of righteousness;" who, not only by preaching, but by his faith and obedience to God's commands, both warned and "condemned the world" (Heb. xi. 7). This patriarchal "preacher of righteousness" no doubt enforced its claims by repeating Enoch's prophecy. During the hundred and twenty years that the ark was preparing, "the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah;" but, as the threefold testimony of Enoch, of Methuselah, and of Noah failed to check the torrent of ungodliness which flooded the world, God, in the majesty of his justice, manifested himself by "bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." Then was fulfilled the prophecy of Enoch, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all." "The windows of heaven were opened; the fountains of the great deep were broken up; and every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground" (Gen. vii.).

It may be asked, if the prophecy of the Lord's coming was fulfilled thus, why is He represented as coming with ten thousand of his saints? We answer, although the prophecy is thus worded, "BEHOLD, the Lord cometh," &c., it does not therefore follow that there was, in its accomplishment, any personal appearance either of the Lord himself or of his ten thousand saints. There was no visible appearance of the Almighty Judge: the Lord was made known (or manifested) "by the judgments which He executed" (Ps. ix. 16.) The ten thousand saints attending Him at his coming to destroy all flesh by the Deluge may possibly have been the ministers of his justice, who, in some way, to us unknown, were his unseen agents in opening the windows of heaven, and in breaking up the fountains of the great deep. Or they may have been introduced into Enoch's prophecy as a poetical image, to convey to men the idea of Almighty and irresistible power. Such imagery is poetically employed by Moses when describing the giving of the law: "God came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir, . . . and He came with ten thousand of his saints" (Deut. xxxiii. 2). The same idea is expressed, though by imagery somewhat varied, in the Psalm composed by David to celebrate the conducting of the ark to Mount Zion: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even

thousands of angels" (Ps. lxxviii. 17). Such language and such symbols are well adapted to impress mankind with the idea of Almighty power, but are simply ridiculous if literally applied to Him who is invisible, infinite, and incomprehensible.

When the apostle would impress the Hebrew Christians with the superior privileges they enjoyed as the subjects of Christ's kingdom, he says, "Ye are come to an innumerable company of angels," &c. Not that they saw any of these celestial beings; but having been "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. i. 13), they were thus brought into a spiritual relationship with God, and with Christ, and with all holy angels, between whom and themselves, in their former state of unbelief, "a great gulf was fixed."

Although the immediate application of Enoch's prophecy was to the sinners of the antediluvian age, it might have been designed by the Holy Spirit to have a further development, a progressive fulfilment. St. Jude applies it to the ungodly of his own times, referring, no doubt, to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. Its ultimate application may point to the day of final judgment. But, however this may be, we may feel sure that wherever the sins prevail which brought the flood on the world of the ungodly,

Divine judgment will certainly follow. The state of the Jewish people at the time St. Jude wrote, quoting Enoch's prophecy, closely resembled that of the antediluvian world. Moses declares, "the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence." And again, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts was only evil continually." The earth also "was full of violence" (Gen. vi.). All this evil resulted from carnal indulgence—"the sons of God," the holy seed of Seth, forming unhallowed connections with "the daughters of men," the unholy seed of Cain. Ungodliness, unbelief, sensuality, and violence filled the earth, so that Noah only was found righteous before God in this generation.

St. Jude, in his Epistle, warns believers against the multitudes then existing whom he describes as lawless and as "ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness;" he speaks of them as "filthy dreamers, who defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities;" he says of them, "What they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves." He describes them as "raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame," as "mockers in the last time" (*i.e.* of the Jewish State), "who walk after their

ungodly lusts ;” and he sums up his description by saying, “These be they that separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.” In this last, as in other respects, the Jews of the apostolic age closely resembled the ungodly antediluvian race, of whom God said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man.” They “resisted the Holy Ghost ;” and, consequently, were “given up to their own hearts’ lust ;” they became the victims of their own sensuality and violence, until, as the apostle Peter had foretold, “they utterly perished in their own corruption” (2 Peter ii. 12).

It is remarkable that St. Peter in his Second Epistle, and St. James in his, dwell largely on the same crimes as those denounced by St. Jude. They denounce the gross sensuality, unbelief, oppression, and violence of the age. These Epistles were written within a very short time of the Roman invasion which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the entire abolition of the Jewish State, both political and ecclesiastical. To this St. Peter refers in his First Epistle when he says, “The end of all things is at hand” (1 Peter iv. 7), and St. James when he says, “Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord” (v. 7). As Enoch, Methuselah, and Noah, in the patriarchal age, gave warning of the approaching destruction of the world, so

in the apostolic age St. James, St. Peter, and St. Jude, as well as our Lord himself, gave timely and repeated warning of the impending doom of the Jewish world. Both destructions are represented as "*the coming of the Lord.*"

History fully sustains the statements of the New Testament respecting the gross sensuality and ungodliness of the Jewish people at the time these judgments came upon them. Josephus, himself a Jew, writes of his nation, "Whilst they trampled under foot every human law, they ridiculed religion, and scoffed at the oracles of the prophets, as the fictions of impostors."—(*Jewish War*, Book IV. chap. vi.) "Had the Romans delayed to come against these execrable persons, I believe either the earth would have swallowed up, or a deluge would have swept away their city, or fire from heaven would have consumed it as it did Sodom; for it brought forth a generation of men far more wicked than they who suffered such things" (Book V. chap. xiii.).

The ingenious author of "*Essays on the Antediluvian Age*" points out the resemblance between the coming of the Lord in the days of Noah to destroy the ungodly world, and his coming at the end of the Jewish age to destroy the city of the ungodly, and to abolish Judaism. He quotes the words of our Saviour, and comments upon them. "As the days of Noah were

(at the Lord's coming foretold by Enoch), 'so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be (at the end of the Jewish age).' 'Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.' But because, in either case, they did not immediately see a sign from heaven, neither did witness the coming of the Lord in the clouds of heaven with ten thousand of his saints to effectuate the glorious change they were expecting, they fell away from the faith; they were disappointed of their worldly expectations; and therefore became sensual and turbulent infidels. They walked after their own lusts, saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things *continue as they were* from the beginning of the creation.' Those evil servants had thought in their heart, 'My Lord delayeth his coming, and they began to smite their fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken.' That such was the case with the apostate Jews, before the destruction of Jerusalem, is clearly recorded in history; and with respect to the antediluvians, we learn from our Saviour that 'they were eating and

drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark; and Moses informs us that they intermarried with the infidel Cainites, and that 'the earth was filled with violence through them.' Yet, 'the Lord of that evil servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for Him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' This denunciation was fully accomplished when, on the one hand, the flood came and took them all away; and, on the other, when the Roman armies nearly extirpated the nation at the subversion of the Jewish polity."—*Essays*, by Rev. W. B. Winning, M.A., pp. 77—79.

We have shown that this prophecy of Enoch had reference first to the destruction of the ungodly world by the Deluge; it was applied, secondly, by St. Jude to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which was effected by fire; and that each of these judgments is described as "the coming of the Lord." But the prophecy may have a third and ultimate reference to the day of final judgment. It does not furnish us with any particulars of the proceedings of "that day." Nor is it necessary that we should have such information. It is enough for us to know that God "has appointed a day in which He will

judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained " (Acts xvii. 31); and that "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether good or bād" (2 Cor. v. 10). This is clearly revealed. It is idle to speculate about the attending circumstances. Our duty is to fix our minds on the great fact that "every one of us must give account of himself to God" (Rom. xiv. 12). Like faithful servants, we must "wait for the coming of our Lord." And until He shall appear, we must seek so to "confess Him before men, that He may confess us before his Father in heaven" (Matt. x. 32). So far as we individually are concerned, the day of our death will be to each of us the day of judgment; for "where the tree falls there it shall lie" (Eccles. xi. 3). As Dr. A. Clarke says, "When thy soul departs from thy body, this will be the coming of the Lord to thee."—*Commentary*, 1 Thess. iii.*

* As, by the raising of Christ from the dead, God gave assurance unto all men that He had appointed a day in which He would "judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He had ordained" (Acts xvii. 31), so, by the translation of Enoch without seeing death, He gave assurance to the antediluvian world that the patriarch's prophecy of the Lord's coming to execute judgment upon the ungodly world would most certainly be fulfilled.

What has been said concerning the Deluge may throw light on the words of the apostle, where he says that "Christ, by his Spirit, went and preached to the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing," &c. (1 Peter iii. 19, 20). It is frequent, in Scripture, to represent ungodly men, enslaved by sin, as shut up in prison. Hence Messiah was commissioned "to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house" (Isa. xlii. 7). He was anointed by the Spirit of the Lord, that He might "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (Isa. lxi. 1). The antediluvian race were the slaves of sin and Satan,—“led captive by the devil at his will.” But they were not cut off from the compassion of Him who is “the Father of the spirits of all flesh.” The Spirit of Christ was imparted to Enoch, who prophesied of “the coming of the Lord.” And the same Spirit was imparted to Noah, who was thus qualified to be “a preacher of righteousness.” Thus, by the twofold testimony of prophecy and of preaching, Christ went and preached to the souls of ungodly men who, in the figurative language of Scripture, are described as being “in prison.” The extent to which the labours of Enoch and of Noah were

successful is not recorded, and will never be known by us in this world: it may be revealed to us in a future state.

Our Lord did not accomplish his mission of opening the prison in the same way as the angel who delivered St. Peter out of the prison in which he had been confined by Herod (see Acts xii.), but by preaching the Gospel to the poor, and thus proclaiming liberty to the captive, and binding up the broken-hearted (Luke iv, 18, 19). It was the enslaved *souls* of men, not their bodies, whom the Great Deliverer came to set free.

II.

*“Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud,
And shall come into Egypt:
And the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence,
And the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.”*
—Isa. xix. 1.

Enoch's prophecy of “the coming of the Lord,” and its fulfilment in the terrible destruction brought on an ungodly world, established amongst the Jews a precedent for the use of this phraseology when any special judgment of God was either foretold or recorded. Thus Isaiah, in the words quoted above, foretells the destruction of Egypt in language similar to that used by the patriarch to foretell the destruction of the antediluvian world. “Behold, the Lord shall *come* into Egypt.” This prophecy of “the Lord

coming" was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar invaded and subdued Egypt; when, in the sublime language of another prophet, describing its utter overthrow, the victorious monarch "arrayed himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd putteth on his garment; when he brake also the images of Bethshemesh, that is in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the gods of the Egyptians were burned with fire" (see Jer. xxxiii. 8—13). The Lord *CAME* in judgment, executing it by the Babylonian king, who was the "rod of his anger, and the staff in whose hand was the instrument of God's indignation" (Isa. x. 5). But there was no personal appearance of the Supreme Judge. As on the day when the Lord *came down* upon Mount Sinai, in the sight of all the people, they "saw no manner of similitude" (Exod. xix.; Deut. iv. 15).

Isaiah's description of the Lord's coming differs materially from that of Enoch. In his coming to destroy the antediluvian world, God is represented as coming with ten thousands of his saints; whereas, in coming to destroy Egypt, the prophet calls us to "behold" Him riding "upon a swift cloud." The Almighty coming in a cloud is almost always in Scripture indicative of his coming to execute extraordinary judgments. An inquiry into the origin of this symbolic language will be both interesting and useful. It has already

been intimated that the modes of thought and of expression prevalent among the Jews may be traced to their earliest records, the writings of Moses. On a former occasion the God of Israel had appeared to the Egyptians in a *cloud*; and this was for their destruction. When Pharaoh was pursuing the Israelites, and these “were sore afraid, and cried out unto the Lord,” “the angel of God” (the Messenger of the Covenant), “who went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a *cloud* of darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these.” How truly sublime is the description which Moses gives of the final catastrophe! “And it came to pass, that in the morning watch, the Lord LOOKED unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians” (Exod. xiv. 24). If we compare this narrative with the poetic description of the same event in the seventy-seventh Psalm, we shall be led to infer that Jehovah’s *looking* through the pillar of fire and of the cloud was (literally) his causing “the depths to be troubled; the clouds to pour out water; the skies to send forth a sound; his arrows (*i.e.* lightnings) to go abroad; so that the voice

of his thunder was in the heaven; the lightnings lightened the world; the earth shook and trembled" (Ps. lxxvii. 16—18). This is the first recorded instance of the Lord appearing in a cloud. It was to destroy Pharaoh and his army. When, therefore, Isaiah foretells a second destruction of the same people, having regard to the circumstances attending the former judgment, he describes it as "the Lord riding on a swift cloud, and coming into Egypt." If the Lord's *coming in a cloud* indicated his coming to judgment, his *riding upon a swift cloud* indicated its speedy execution. Dr. Boothroyd remarks, "Sudden and irresistible destruction is often denoted by God's coming in the clouds of heaven." May not the supernatural condition of the *clouds*, for forty days and forty nights, when the Lord came to fulfil the prophecy of Enoch, have had some influence on subsequent descriptions of his coming in mighty power for judgment?

III.

"*I will come near to you in judgment.*"—MAL. iii. 5.

Here, again, the execution of God's judgments is represented, by the last of the prophets, as his *coming*. "This threatening," says Lowth, "is in answer to their demand, '*Where is the God of judgment?*'" (ii. 17.) God tells them He will hasten the time of judgment, and it shall come

speedily upon them for those sins which are epidemical among them; and if they repent not upon the preaching of the Gospel, He will proceed to the utter excision of the nation." This solemn warning is repeated by Malachi, in the closing words of the Old Testament, in which God exhorts the people to turn from their sins, "lest I *come* and smite the earth with a curse." Lowth says, these words might be better translated, "Lest I come and smite the land (of Judea) with utter destruction." And he adds, "The utter destruction of the Jewish nation and country is here threatened, upon their rejecting the preaching of John the Baptist, and refusing to hearken to his testimony concerning the Messiah that should come after him." It is a significant fact that the closing prophecy in the Old Testament refers to "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," foretelling the destruction of the city and Temple of God, and the abolition of the Mosaic institutions, preparatory to the establishment of Messiah's kingdom. The closing prophecies of the New Testament, on the contrary, portray the glory and happiness of the Christian Church, for the establishment of which the Jewish ritual was abolished; and anticipate the time when the Lord Jesus shall have created all things new; when "all kings shall fall down before Him, and all nations shall serve

Him" (Ps. lxxii. 11), and when He shall have established his "everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. vii. 14).

IV.

"*What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?*"—MATT. xxiv. 3.

From the Old Testament references to "the coming of the Lord" we now proceed to those of the New. The language of this latter book cannot be understood except in the light of the former revelation. An eminent modern Hebrew scholar writes, "The style, the idiom, the innumerable open and latent allusions, the form and substance, in fact, of the fundamental books of Christianity contained in the New Testament, written (as Lightfoot has it) by Jews, among Jews, and for Jews, can only be properly appreciated and thoroughly understood by constant reference to the oral literature of the period."—(*Literary Remains of Emanuel Deutsch*, p. 200.) It cannot be doubted that both the oral literature of the time, and the language of the New Testament itself, received their impress mainly from the Old Testament Scriptures. In endeavouring to ascertain the meaning of any portion of God's word, we must consider, not what meaning we English Christians in the nineteenth century

would most naturally attach to the phraseology of the New Testament, but what the Jews, who heard our Lord and his apostles speak, understood by the words they uttered.

We have seen that the Old Testament closes with a prediction of "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," by which, as Lowth observes, "the utter destruction of the Jewish nation was threatened," in consequence of their rejecting the testimony of John the Baptist to the Messiah. In the prophecies respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, uttered by our Lord shortly before his death, frequent reference is made to "the coming of the Son of man." When addressed by one of his disciples, who said, "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here," the Lord replied, "Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down" (Mark xiii. 1, 2). This announcement, so contrary to their most cherished expectations with regard to Messiah's kingdom, astonished the disciples, and they appear to have chosen four of their number to confer privately with their Master respecting this perplexing prediction. They ask Him, "When shall these things be? and what sign shall there be when all these things shall be fulfilled?" St. Matthew's account of their questions varies from that of the other

evangelists, for he adds, "What shall be the sign of *thy coming, and of the end of the world?*" (Matt. xxiv. 3.) St. Luke's account corresponds with that of St. Mark. Whatever variations may appear in the phraseology of these three records, their meaning must be substantially the same; and the reply of our Lord is an answer to the same inquiries recorded, with some variety of diction, by the three evangelists. It is Matthew only who connects with the inquiry any reference to the Lord's "coming," and to "the end of the world." This may be accounted for by the acknowledged fact that St. Matthew's Gospel was written mainly for the use of the Hebrew converts, and therefore he uses terms which, though familiar to them, would not be understood by Gentile converts, for whom mainly the other evangelists wrote.

By "the coming of the Lord," in its most important sense, the Jews understood the reign of the Messiah: this, no doubt, the disciples had in view when they asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming?" and by "the end of the world" those spiritually enlightened meant the period when the Mosaic institutions should be abolished, in order that the kingdom of Messiah might be substituted. Thus St. Paul, writing to the Hebrews, speaks of Christ as having "once, in *the end of the world*, appeared to put away

sin by the sacrifice of himself" (ix. 26). He speaks also of God having "*in these last days* spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. i. 2). By which expressions we are to understand the last days of the Mosaic dispensation, and the end of the Jewish world. So, too, St. John writes, "Even now are there many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John ii. 18).

By comparing the statements of the three evangelists, we may be helped to ascertain the purport of the apostles' inquiries, and the meaning of our Lord's reply:—

"And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. xxiv. 3.)

"And as He sat on the mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter and James, and John and Andrew, asked Him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" (Mark xiii. 3.)

"And they asked Him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be, when all these things shall come to pass?" (Luke xxi. 7.)

The great events foretold by their Master, and referred to by St. Mark and St. Luke, when the disciples asked Him what sign should precede the fulfilment of "these things," are the very same as those expressed by St. Matthew in Jewish phraseology, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

The first question proposed by the disciples refers to the time when the destruction foretold should occur : "Tell us, *when* shall these things be?" Our Lord informs them : "Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled" (Matt. xxiv. 34). It is an undisputed fact that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple took place within forty years after our Lord's death ; so that many who were alive when the prediction was uttered lived to see its accomplishment. This, as Bishop Porteus observes, "is an unanswerable proof that everything our Lord had been saying in the preceding part of the chapter related principally not to the day of judgment, or to any other remote event, but to the destruction of Jerusalem, which did in reality happen before that generation had passed away."—(*Works*, vol. v. p. 219.) Our Lord had previously declared to the twelve apostles, when He commissioned them to preach, "Verily, I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come" (Matt. x. 23); *i.e.* before the Gospel had been preached in every city of Israel, Jerusalem should be destroyed by the Roman armies (see Boothroyd's "Commentary"), and the foundations laid of the New Jerusalem. The "coming of the Son of man" was revealed by the fulfilment of his prophecy, "Verily, I say unto you,

there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."

Bishop Porteus thus writes concerning the question of the disciples:—" 'Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?' The expressions here made use of, *the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world*, at first view, naturally lead our thoughts to the coming of Christ at the day of judgment and the final dissolution of this earthly globe. But a due attention to the parallel passages in St. Mark and St. Luke, and a critical examination of the real import of those two phrases in various parts of Scripture, will soon convince a careful inquirer that by *the coming of Christ* is here meant, not his coming to judge the world at the last day, but his coming to execute judgment on Jerusalem; and that by *the end of the world* is to be understood not the final consummation of all things here below, but the end of *that age*, the end of the Jewish State and polity, the subversion of their city, temple, and government."—*Lectures on St. Matthew*, p. 194.

It is not to our present purpose to dwell upon the varied signs which our Lord declared would indicate the approach of this final catastrophe. Having enumerated them, He adds, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in

heaven ; and then shall all the tribes of the land (see Boothroyd's version) mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory" (Matt. xxiv. 30). This declaration, made originally to his disciples, our Lord repeated when standing before the Sanhedrim. When the high priest said to Him, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God," our Lord replied in the affirmative ; and added, "Moreover, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi. 64). On both these occasions our Lord applies to himself that portion of Daniel's vision where the prophet narrates, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. vii. 13, 14). The Jews applied these words of Daniel to the Messiah. R. Saadiah, commenting on them, says, "This is the Lord our righteousness" (see Lightfoot,

vol. v. p. 259). The appropriating of them to himself by our Lord was regarded by the Sanhedrim as blasphemy. Hence the high priest, on hearing them thus applied, "rent his clothes," and said, "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses?" Accordingly, they condemned Him "guilty of death."

Observe, our Lord does not say, "Then shall appear in heaven the sign of the Son of man," although some have thus interpreted his words; but He says, "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven;" *i.e.* it should be made plain by the fearful judgments He would execute, that He whom the Jews had scorned, rejected, and crucified as a malefactor, had been by God highly exalted; they should see that "all power had been committed unto Him, both in heaven and earth;" and that, after a lapse of nearly forty years, this prophecy, uttered by our Lord in presence of his judges, should receive its terrible accomplishment. It was fulfilled when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the Roman army, so that "not a stone was left upon another." This, in the Scripture language, was the "coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven." Bishop Newton justly says, "The destruction of Jerusalem was as ample a manifestation of Christ's power

and glory as if He had himself come visibly in the clouds of heaven.”—*Prophecy*, p. 409.

Dr. Lightfoot thus comments on the words, “Then shall they see the sign of the Son of man in heaven:”—“Not any visible appearance of Christ or of the cross in the clouds (as some have imagined); but, whereas the Jews would not own Christ before for the Son of man or the Messiah, then, by the vengeance He should execute upon them, they and all the world should see that He evidently was so. This, therefore, is called ‘his coming,’ and ‘his coming in his kingdom;’ because this did first declare his power, glory, and victory on that nation that had despised Him” (vol. iii. p. 141). “Many times they asked Him for a sign; now a sign shall appear that He is the true Messiah, whom they despised, derided, crucified; namely, his signal vengeance, such as never any nation felt from the foundation of the world” (vol. xi. p. 304).

A remarkable passage in the prophecy of Zechariah confirms the interpretation of the texts we have been considering. The prophet is encouraging the people, recently returned from captivity, by foretelling the successes of the Jewish arms, under the Maccabees, over the kings of Syria. “When I have raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee

as the sword of a mighty man" (Zech. ix. 14). He then adds, "And the Lord shall be SEEN over them." Not that there was, in the fulfilment of this prediction, any visible manifestation of the Divine Presence; but the fact of his presence was proved by the astonishing success of his people. Lowth's exposition of these words is, "He shall give conspicuous tokens of his presence with them, and his presiding over them, and directing them in all their enterprises." In the same sense were the Jews, who condemned our Lord, to SEE that He was exalted to "the right hand of power," by his executing on them the fearful judgments He had himself foretold.

V.

"The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall He render unto every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."—MATT. xvi. 27, 28.

Our Lord, in these words, again refers to the vision of Daniel, who beheld "One like unto the Son of man, who came in the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and was brought near before Him; and to whom was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, and nations, and languages, should serve Him," &c. (Dan. vii. 13, 14). He had just de-

clared to his apostles the Rock on which his Church should be built, namely, the fundamental truth that He was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." He had predicted his own sufferings and death. He had forewarned his disciples that they also must take up the cross and follow Him; and now He gives them encouragement by the assurance that some of them should live to "see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." As they were to share in their Master's sufferings, so they were to share also in "the joy that was set before Him."

Dr. Adam Clarke, commenting on these verses in Matthew, says, "This was the glorious mediatorial kingdom which Christ was about to set up by the destruction of the Jewish nation and polity, and the diffusion of his Gospel through the whole world. If the words be taken in this sense, the *angels* or messengers may signify the apostles and their successors in the sacred ministry preaching the Gospel in the power of the Holy Ghost."—*Clarke's Commentary*.

On the following verse, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom," the same writer says, "This verse seems to confirm the above explanation, as our Lord evidently speaks of the establishment of the Chris-

tian Church after the day of Pentecost, and its final triumph after the destruction of the Jewish polity; as if He had said, ‘Some of you, my disciples, shall continue to live until these things take place.’”

Matthew Henry interprets these words of our Lord as declaring “the near approach of his kingdom in this world;” and he adds, “This points to Christ’s coming by the pouring out of his Spirit, the planting of the Gospel Church, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the taking away of the place and nation of the Jews, who were the most bitter enemies to Christianity. Here was the Son of man coming in his kingdom. Many then present lived to see it, particularly John, who lived till after the destruction of Jerusalem, and saw Christianity planted in the world.”—*Commentary, in loco.*

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, together with the abolition of the whole of the Mosaic institutions, was preliminary to the fulfilment of Daniel’s prophetic vision, in which he saw “One like unto the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven;” to whom “was given a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him” (Dan. vii.).

Dr. Samuel Clarke, commenting on this prophecy of Daniel, says, “The Jews all very well knew that this was a plain prophecy and cha-

racter of the Messiah. And therefore our Saviour, by taking upon himself that title by way of eminence, *the Son of man*, clearly enough intimated whom He professed himself to be.”—*Sermons*, vol. vii. p. 170.

On the words, “Behold, One like the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven,” Mr. Wintle thus comments:—“This, in the opinion of all commentators, corresponds with the stone that struck the image” (see Dan. ii. 34, 45); *i.e.* the striking of the image, and the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven, are two figures predicting one and the same event. “The Jews acknowledge that by the Son of man is meant the Messiah; and the description of the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven is exactly what our Saviour applies to himself, when solemnly adjured by the high priest to declare whether He was the Christ, the Son of God.”

Bishop Porteus concurs with the above expositors, for he says, “When the prophet Daniel is predicting this very appearance of Christ” (Matt. xxvi. 64), “to punish the Jews, he describes Him as coming in the clouds of heaven, and there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom.”—*Works*, vol. v. p. 217.

VI.

*“Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.”—*REV. i. 7.

These words also have reference to the vision of Daniel. We have seen that our Lord, in his prophetic discourse to his disciples, applies to himself the words of the prophet, “They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory;” and that He repeats this prediction when standing before the Sanhedrim (Matt. xxiv. 30, and xxvi. 64). The author of the Apocalypse, at the commencement of “the revelation of Jesus Christ,” when the prophecy was about to be fulfilled, adopts the same language, using the present tense instead of the future, because, as he declares, “the time is at hand” (Rev. i. 3). Thus we have the original prophecy of Daniel; the repeated application of it to himself by our Lord; and the declaration of its proximate fulfilment in the Apocalypse of St. John.

It may help our inquiry if we place these three passages of Scripture side by side; and it will, at the same time, serve to illustrate an important method of interpreting passages “hard to be understood:”—

DANIEL'S VISION.

—
 "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. vii. 13, 14).

OUR LORD'S PREDICTIONS.

—
 1. *To his Disciples.*
 "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. xxiv. 30).

2. *Before the Sanhedrim.*

"Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi. 64).

ST. JOHN'S ANNUNCIATION OF THE APPROACHING FULFILMENT.

—
 "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen" (Rev. i. 7).

The exclamation of St. John, "Behold, He cometh with clouds," indicates the near approach of the fulfilment of the great event to which he referred: just as the language of Isaiah, "Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and cometh into Egypt" (ix. 1), indicated the near approach of the judgment foretold. "The time was at hand." Both were judgments about to be executed on the persecutors of God's Church. Egypt was the earliest oppressor of God's ancient people, the Jewish Church. Jerusalem was the bitter and

unrelenting persecutor of the Christian Church. The destruction of each is represented as "the coming of the Lord." "Behold, the Lord rideth on a swift cloud, and cometh into Egypt;" and "Behold, He cometh with clouds," &c. The manner in which this coming was to be manifested is declared in some subsequent parts of the Apocalypse. These will come under consideration when we treat of the symbolic language of Scripture. At present we shall merely quote the opinion of some able commentators on the text, "Behold, He cometh with clouds."

Dr. Adam Clarke says, "This relates to his coming to execute judgment on the enemies of his religion; perhaps to his coming to destroy Jerusalem, as He was to be particularly manifested to them that *pierced Him*—which must mean the incredulous and rebellious Jews." The clause, "And *all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him*," Dr. Clarke, with many others, renders, "*All the tribes of the land*," &c.; and adds, "By this the Jewish people are most evidently intended; and, therefore, the whole verse may be understood as predicting the destruction of the Jews, and is a presumptive proof that the Apocalypse was written *before* the final overthrow of the Jewish State."—*Dr. A. Clarke's Commentary.*

Dr. Lightfoot's remarks harmonize with those

of Dr. Clarke, both as to the date of the book and in the interpretation of these words. He also quotes the following texts, as applicable to the same prediction:—"Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. x. 37); "Behold, the Judge is at the door" (James v. 9); "Behold, I come quickly" (Rev. xxii. 12); and he adds, "These, with many other passages, must all be understood of Christ's coming in judgment and vengeance against that wicked nation."—(*Works*, vol. xii. p. 435.) So, too, the words of our Lord to Peter respecting the beloved disciple are to be understood, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Peter had his crown of martyrdom before the destruction of Jerusalem, before "that which was decayed and waxed old had vanished away" (Heb. viii. 13); whereas John survived the catastrophe. He was, probably, the only one of the twelve apostles who beheld the passing away of the old heavens and the old earth (*i.e.* the Jewish ecclesiastical and political State), preparatory to the creation of the "new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter iii. 13).

VII.

"Where is the promise of his coming?"—2 PETER iii. 4.

Such was the question triumphantly asked by the enemies of Christ when nearly forty years

had elapsed, and no sign appeared to indicate that his remarkable prophecies were about to be fulfilled. The Messiahship of our Lord was attested by a threefold evidence—his miracles, his resurrection, and his prophecies. The two former had borne their testimony; that of the latter had not yet been manifested. Deep was the interest felt by the unbelieving Jews in these hitherto unfulfilled predictions, and great was the wrath they excited, as is evidenced by the charge brought against Stephen—"This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts vi. 13, 14). Thus the charge of blasphemy, brought first against the Lord, was brought also against his servant, and on the same pretext; and this shows in what sense Stephen, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," understood the words of his Master, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi. 24). The vision vouchsafed to the first martyr just before his death was designed to confirm his faith in the Lord's prophecy, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts vii. 55). Christ had

been condemned to death for predicting his exaltation to the right hand of God ; and Stephen was executed for declaring that he beheld Him thus exalted. Many who had heard the prediction uttered by the Lord Jesus heard also the testimony of Stephen ; and many, probably, who condemned the Master, joined also in condemning his servant. Both suffered for alleged blasphemy ; and this condemnation was brought on both for predicting the destruction of the city and the Temple of God, and the subsequent exaltation of the Messiah.

Whilst the unbelieving Jews gloried for awhile in the non-fulfilment of these prophecies, Christians were looking forward, with intense anxiety, to their accomplishment. They waited, in faith, for the coming of the Lord, according to his own predictions. The fulfilment of these was to demonstrate to the Jews and to the whole world that, although He had been executed as an impostor and malefactor, He was neither the one nor the other, but was, in reality, what He had professed to be—the Messiah, the Son of God ; and that it should be seen by those who had condemned and executed Him that He was exalted to “the right hand of power,” or, in other words, to “the right hand of God.” Thus the threefold testimony to his Messiahship—that of his miracles, of his resurrection, and of the

exact fulfilment of his prophecies—should be complete.

It was in order to neutralise the evidence arising from the fulfilment of our Lord's predictions that the Emperor Julian resolved to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, and to restore the Mosaic ritual, with the daily sacrifices. "The RUINED TEMPLE," as Dr. Warburton pointedly remarks, "was the trophy of Christ's victory over his enemies; so that the project to restore it could not but give them" (the disciples) "the alarm." —(*Works*, vol. viii. p. 61.) "The Church was now pushed upon the very crisis of its fate. Its enemies, supported by the whole power of the empire, had brought a decisive scheme to its projection—a scheme which was to reflect eternal dishonour upon the *Oracles of Truth*. The credit of God's servants, the authority of his Word, and the very pretensions of revelation were all vitally interested in the event. The God of the Christians was publicly challenged; his power was defied to protect his dispensation against the impending stroke. Destitute of all human aid, their only reliance was on heaven."

"Well, the impious attack was made, and the expected protection afforded. The same great and impartial historian" (Ammianus Marcellinus, himself a pagan, and a great admirer of Julian) "who acquaints us with the attempt, informs

us likewise of the defeat of it. His account is in these words :—‘ The emperor, being desirous to eternise his reign by the greatness of his achievements, projected to build, at an immense expense, the proud and magnificent Temple at Jerusalem ; which, after many combats and much bloodshed on both sides during the siege by Vespasian, was, with great difficulty, taken and destroyed by Titus. He committed the conduct of this affair to Alypius of Antioch, who formerly had been lieutenant in Britain. When, therefore, Alypius had set himself to the vigorous execution of his charge, in which he had all the assistance that the governor of the province could afford him, horrible balls of fire, breaking out near the foundations, with frequent and reiterated attacks, rendered the place, from time to time, inaccessible to the scorched and blasted workmen ; and the victorious element continuing in this manner—obstinately and resolutely bent, as it were, to drive them to a distance—Alypius thought best to give over the enterprise.”—*Warburton’s Works*, vol. viii. Book I.

Whilst these events were transpiring in Judea, the Emperor Julian, engaged in prosecuting the war in Persia, fell by the lance of a soldier, and died in his tent, in the thirty-second year of his age. His efforts to overthrow the Gospel proved utterly futile ; they remind us of the words of

the psalmist, applicable to all Messiah's enemies, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Ps. ii. 9). The blasphemous attempt of the Roman emperor to falsify the words of Christ, and to build up what He had destroyed, ended in his own destruction, and tended to establish the faith which he laboured so earnestly to overthrow!

SECTION II.—THE COMING OF THE LORD IN GREAT
SPIRITUAL POWER TO ESTABLISH HIS KING-
DOM ON EARTH.

Hitherto our inquiries respecting "the coming of the Lord" have been directed to those Scripture statements in which his coming has been manifested by the exercise of almighty power, producing great physical results, such as the destruction of mighty empires and the "bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." But there is a *spiritual coming* as well as a material; and whilst the latter appears in great physical judgments, the former is manifested by the outpouring of spiritual blessings in an extraordinary degree. The one reveals to us the power of God, guided by righteousness, over the universe of matter; the other displays the same power, guided by love, over the universe of

mind. We shall first examine some texts in the Old Testament in which reference is made to this spiritual coming of the Lord.

I.

"In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."—EXOD. xx. 24.

This grand promise, which has ever proved to the Church, in all acts of worship, "the fountain of life" (Ps. xxxvi. 9), and without which all worship is utterly void, can be fulfilled only in a spiritual coming. Its counterpart is to be found in our Saviour's promise to his people, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20). These words of Immanuel renew to the Christian Church the promise made by Jehovah to the Jewish. The prosperity of the Church depends entirely upon her realising the fulfilment of this promise. Yet nothing external appears when the Lord thus *comes* to his worshipping people. His coming is made known by its effects—by the profound humility, the deep earnestness, the heavenly aspirations of those who are conscious of his presence, and by the conversion to God of those to whom his Gospel is proclaimed.

II.

“I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou COME unto me?”—Ps. ci. 2.

The Psalm in which these words occur was written by David to declare the principles on which, like Abraham and like Joshua, he had determined to regulate his household and govern his kingdom. Evidently he believed that the promise made to the Church might, if sought, be realised also by “the *families* that call upon God’s name.” And therefore, in order that the Lord may *come* to him, he not only entreats his presence, but declares his resolve to put away everything offensive to the Divine Majesty, and to “walk before his house with a perfect heart.” God *comes* into Christian households now; not visibly, but his coming is manifested by the purity, the order, the love, and the peace which unite in holiest bonds, to God and to each other, the various members of the family which is sanctified by the Father’s presence. Such a family will prove a fountain of blessing to neighbouring households: by their benevolence to the poor, and their concern for the ignorant, and by following the example of their “Father in heaven,” they will show to all around that they realise the fulfilment of that Divine promise, “Lo, I come,

and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord" (Zech. ii. 10).

There are families into which the Lord never thus comes, houses which He never thus enters ; his presence is neither sought nor desired. There are other households which, like the family at Bethany, He delights to visit, and where his presence is felt to be the source of peace and joy. Happy would it be if all were concerned to realise the fulfilment of his promise, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. iii. 20). The realisation of this universally would be the fulfilment of that glorious promise, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xxviii. 14). Every Christian family would then be a nursery for the Church.

III.

The revival of spiritual religion, as it is the result of God's presence by his Spirit in the Church, is represented as the *coming of the Lord*. In the fiftieth Psalm we read—

"Our God *cometh*, and will not be silent ;
Before Him a fire devoureth,
And about Him is a mighty tempest"

(Ps. l. 3, Boothroyd's version).

This description is evidently taken from the manifestation of God when He came down on Mount Sinai to promulgate the law. Any one reading the whole Psalm carefully will see that the design of the inspired writer is to show that the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law were, in the judgment of God, utterly valueless in themselves. God himself declares that no sacrifices, however costly, can be of any value to Him, "for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (ver. 10). And He proceeds to show that spiritual sacrifices, the offering of thanksgiving, and praise and prayer, which are the expressions of gratitude and love, and of childlike confidence in God, are the only worship which can be acceptable to Him. The inspired writer seems to anticipate the great truth taught so forcibly by our Lord, "God is a Spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John iv. 24). Love is worship—the highest we can pay. Supreme love will express itself in praise and in cheerful obedience; and therefore the Psalm concludes, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God." In this result, accomplished by Divine Power, we see "the *coming* of the Lord."

The essence of the psalmist's teaching appears

to be that, as certainly as Jehovah was present at Mount Sinai when He proclaimed the law, and manifested his presence by outward and visible signs, so surely will He appear to establish that "dispensation of the Spirit" to which the law was merely preliminary; and that his presence would be manifested, not by external convulsions of nature, but by the outpouring of his Holy Spirit, to write his laws upon the hearts of men, and to engrave them on their minds. This is illustrated by the teaching of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews (xii. 18—29).

IV.

The prophet Isaiah thus prays for the coming of the Lord by the mighty power of his Spirit:—"Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest *come down*, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence" (Isa. lxiv. 1). The prophet, like the psalmist, looks back to the manifestation of God's presence on Mount Sinai; and he also looks forward to the manifestation of Divine Power which was to set the seal of God on the Gospel. For, having thus adverted to former Divine interpositions, "When thou didst great and terrible things which we looked not for, thou *camest down*," &c. (ver. 3), he immediately adds words which are applied by the apostle to "the

dispensation of the Spirit :” “ Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit ” (1 Cor. ii. 9). Physical convulsions declared the presence of the Divine Lawgiver on Mount Sinai ; and the people, like the mountain itself, trembled greatly. The sweet influence exerted by the Spirit of truth and love reveals to us the presence of God in the latter dispensation. When we see in believers “ the fruit of the Spirit in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth, proving what is acceptable unto the Lord ” (Eph. v. 9, 10), we behold a more glorious manifestation of God’s presence than was vouchsafed to Israel ; and we feel the real significance of the prayer, “ Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest *come down*, that the mountains ” (the obstructions which stand in the way of the Great Deliverer) “ might flow down at thy presence.”

v.

The promulgation of the Gospel and its universal extension being accomplished “ through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God ” (Rom. xv. 19), are spoken of prophetically as the *coming* of the Lord. The

psalmist calls upon the heavens to rejoice, the earth to be glad, and all nature to "rejoice before the Lord; for He *cometh*, for He cometh to judge the earth" (*i.e.* to establish judgment in the earth). "He shall judge the world" (*i.e.* the Gentiles) "with righteousness, and the people" (Israel) "with his truth" (Ps. xevi. 13). Although this prophecy in its fulfilment may include the incarnation of our Lord and his ministry on earth, it comprehends far more than these, and will receive a growing accomplishment until the final "restitution of all things," in the universal reign of Him who is the King of righteousness and the King of peace." The great work of creating all things new, initiated by our Lord in the days of his flesh, He still carries on now that He is "exalted to the right hand of power;" but whereas He did it personally when on earth, He now carries it on through the agency of his servants, who, being led by his Spirit, walk in his steps, and through whom He will accomplish triumphantly the great work which was commenced in apparent weakness. It was foretold of the Messiah, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth" (Isa. xlii. 4). In spite of the raging of the heathen and the deadly hatred of the Jewish people, our Lord persevered in fulfilling his personal ministry; so that at the close of it He

could look up to his Father and say, "I have glorified thee upon the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John xvii. 4). Nor shall his people fail or be discouraged; but, sustained by Him, shall persevere in carrying on the work of the Lord, until in Christ, the promised seed, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The most glorious *coming of the Lord* will be when, by the power of his Holy Spirit, He reigns in the hearts of all men. Then, when He shall have fulfilled his word, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. xxi. 5), all the redeemed on earth will unite with all holy angels, and with the spirits of just men made perfect, in singing, "Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. xix. 6). "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. xxii. 20).

We are encouraged not only by prophecy to anticipate this great result, but also by many "exceeding great and precious promises." We shall consider one of these.

"Sing, and rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord" (Zech. ii. 10).

This gracious promise of the Lord's *coming*, and of his dwelling in the midst of his people, was given to Israel on their return from the Babylonian captivity; and was designed to encourage them to rebuild the Temple, and to restore

the worship of the one living and true God. The importance of the promise itself is manifested by the consequences which will result from its fulfilment: "And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people" (ver. 11). Hence we infer that the Lord coming to his people, and dwelling in their midst, is the indispensable antecedent to the conversion of heathen nations. His Divine power, giving effect to the ordinances of his house, manifests his presence as clearly as if our eyes beheld Him personally.

This grand promise may be appropriated by the Christian Church, "the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. xii. 22). Indeed, its main application must be to the Gospel dispensation; for the promise, "Many nations shall join themselves unto the Lord in that day, and shall be my people," did not receive its fulfilment during the existence of the Mosaic dispensation; for although the individual converts to Judaism after the captivity were numerous, not one nation was converted, or ever recognised as God's people. It is all-important that the Christian Church should realise her true position in reference to this important promise, so essential to her success and the triumph of the Gospel. She can never influence effectually the masses of our home population, or spread the kingdom of Christ in heathen lands, except by

securing the presence of her Lord, and his abiding in her midst. How, then, can this Divine Presence be secured by the universal Church? Three things are requisite—strong faith, fervent prayer, and loving obedience. Faith is the first essential, we have the promise; but it may remain like a nugget of gold deep down in the earth. We must grasp it, we must appreciate its value, and rely on the faithfulness of Him who has promised. United and fervent prayer is necessary; for to the fulfilment of his most gracious promises this condition is affixed: “Thus saith the Lord God: I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them” (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). And lastly, loving obedience to the laws of Christ is essential, as we read, in a subsequent part of this prophecy, referring to the spread of Messiah’s kingdom, “And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God” (Zech. vi. 15).

If, therefore, this Divine Presence is not fully enjoyed by the Church in the present day, it must be owing to our want of diligently obeying “the voice of the Lord our God.” He “who walks among the seven golden candlesticks” will not dwell in the midst of a divided Church—or a lukewarm Church—or an impure, worldly-minded Church—or in a Church which

has "a name to live, whilst it is dead." We must secure that unity which results from all being baptized by one Spirit into one body (2 Cor. xii. 13). We must have the Spirit of Him who said, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John ii. 17); and we must seek to attain that purity of heart by which we shall be prepared to see God, and to "walk in the light as He is in the light" (1 John i. 7). Then the Church may look for the conversion of the world, through the abiding presence of Him who has promised, "Lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord." (Zech. ii. 10).

VI.

The coming of the Lord Jesus, for the conversion of the Jews by the power of his Spirit, will prove to be one of the most glorious acts in the regeneration of the world, and one of the grandest triumphs over the enemy of mankind. The apostle says, "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. xi. 26). This will be, emphatically, his coming in glory. This is "the blessed hope" of the Church. This will be a most "glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus ii. 13, com-

pared with Ps. cii. 16). The Son of man was manifested in Divine glory when He came, "in the clouds of heaven," to destroy the city of those who had condemned and crucified Him; but it was the glory of Almighty Power executing judgment. When He shall be manifested in the conversion of the nation by whom He was despised, rejected, and murdered, He will appear in the glory of Divine compassion and infinite love. In the former case, He came to destroy; in the latter, He will come to save. His coming will not be "in the clouds of heaven," for judgment: He will appear as "the Sun of righteousness," rising on the benighted world, "with healing in his wings" (Mal. iv. 2). The Jewish nation shall then joyfully respond to the prophetic call, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." And then shall be fulfilled the cheering promise—

"For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
And gross darkness the nations;
But the Lord shall arise upon thee,
And his glory shall be seen upon thee.
And the Gentiles shall come to thy light,
And kings to the brightness of thy rising"
(Isa. lx. 1—3).

A striking and very interesting resemblance is observable between God's dealings with the Jews

on their return from the captivity in Babylon, and what the Scriptures lead us to expect when “He who scattered Israel shall gather them, and keep them, as a shepherd doth his flock” (Jer. xxxi. 10). After the lapse of seventy years, during which the harp of Israel hung upon the willows fringing the bank of the Euphrates (Ps. cxxxvii.), God appeared in his glory (Ps. cii. 16), the glory of infinite condescension and love! He who “telleteth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names, built up Jerusalem, and gathered together the outcasts of Israel. He healed the broken in heart; He bound up their wounds; He lifted up the meek; He cast the wicked down to the ground” (Ps. cxlvii. 2—6). The glory in which He appeared when He “built up Zion” was no external glory. It was manifested, as we have already seen, in his regarding the prayer of the destitute; in his looking down from the height of his sanctuary—

“To hear the groaning of the prisoner;
To loose those that are appointed unto death;
To declare the name of the Lord in Zion,
And his praise in Jerusalem;
When the people are gathered together,
And the nations to serve the Lord”

(Ps. cii. 20—22).

The first destruction of Jerusalem was designed to correct the idolatrous propensities of the Jewish

people: they passed through the fiery furnace, and were purified from their idolatrous defilement, into which they have never since relapsed. The word of God, by Ezekiel, was fulfilled of those who came forth from Babylon: "Ye shall see their ways and their doings; and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, even concerning all that I have brought upon it. And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings; and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. xiv. 22, 23). God's purpose in effectually correcting their idolatrous conformity to the heathen was accomplished; and although more than two thousand years have passed away, the seed of Abraham have never relapsed into this degrading sin.

The second destruction of Jerusalem was a judgment brought on the nation for a still greater crime. By the worship of idols God's chosen people "changed their glory for that which did not profit" (Jer. ii. 11). But, by the rejection of the Messiah, they were led to "crucify the Lord of glory;" and the imprecation they uttered, "His blood be upon us, and upon our children," has been terribly fulfilled. But "the time to favour Zion, yea, the set time, will come." As the greater sin has been visited by a greater and more protracted punishment, so, when the pur-

pose of God shall have been accomplished by the seed of Abraham entering into the new covenant of which He whom their fathers crucified is the Mediator, this glorious result may be the final triumph of our Lord—his coming in glory—the glory of his spiritual might, not to revenge himself upon his enemies, but to convert them to himself; not to destroy by his power, but to save by his love.

Again, as the captivity of the ten tribes in Media and elsewhere, and the captivity of Judah and Benjamin in Babylon, wonderfully prepared the way for the first publication of the Gospel, so we have reason to believe that the present dispersion of the seed of Abraham in all parts of the world is preparatory to their preaching, throughout the world (“when the veil shall have been taken away”), “that faith which they once destroyed.” The first destruction of Jerusalem resulted in great benefits; but these were comparatively local and limited. The second destruction, which cleared the ground for the foundation of Christ’s spiritual temple, will eventually result in the universal establishment of his authority who “is King over all the earth;” and then the Church will sing with exultation—

“God reigneth over the heathen,

God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness”

(Ps. xlvii. 7, 8).

The conversion of Saul the persecutor, and his consecration by the Lord Jesus to be the great apostle of the Gentiles, may be the type of the conversion of the whole nation, when "all Israel shall be saved." They who persecuted us in times past will, like the apostle, preach the faith which they once destroyed, and thus the God of Abraham will be glorified in them; and the promise made to the patriarch will be fulfilled in his descendants, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

VII.

"And then shall that wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the breath of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."*—2 THESS. ii. 8.

The prediction contained in these words affords an example of the coming of the Lord *in great spiritual power* to overthrow and destroy the opponents of his kingdom. Various interpretations are given of this prophecy. Dr. Lightfoot applies it, first, to antichristian Judaism, and subsequently to antichristian Romanism. Bishop Newton, with most Protestant commentators, applies it to the Papacy. But the late Dean Alford maintained that "the apostacy" (or falling away) spoken of by the apostle "is yet to be mani-

* Alford's version.

fested ;” and he describes it as “the spread of secular unbelief, which denies and casts off God ; which sets up nature above God ; and physical law above personal will.”—(*Alford on the Epistles*, p. 63.) The destruction of all these forms of Antichrist may be included in this prophecy.

The apostle, in writing thus to the Thessalonians, evidently has in view the words of Isaiah, foretelling the establishment of Messiah’s kingdom, and his certain triumph over all opposition. The prophet’s words are—

“And He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,
And with the breath of his lips shall He slay the wicked” (Isa. xi. 4).

In the first verse of this chapter the Messiah is described as “a rod out of the stem of Jesse,” indicating the human nature of our Lord, who “was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. i. 3) ; and in the second verse it is foretold, “The Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord,” evidently pointing to the Divine nature of Him who was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. i. 4). By this

union of the Divine with the human nature, Messiah was qualified for the great work for which He was manifested, "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John iii. 8). To accomplish this, He is represented as smiting the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips slaying the wicked. The words of the apostle, foretelling the destruction of "that wicked one whom the Lord shall consume by the breath of his mouth, and destroy by the brightness of his coming," are evidently an adaptation of Isaiah's prophecy. We proceed to inquire into its meaning.

The language, both of the prophet and the apostle, though somewhat varied, is eminently symbolical. To ascertain the meaning of the prophecy, we must interpret the symbols. "The rod," or sceptre, is the emblem of power. So the psalmist writes, "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion" (Ps. cx. 2). By the rod of Christ's mouth must be understood the power of his Word, *i. e.* of his Holy Gospel. "The earth," in Scripture language, is the symbol of unregenerate human nature. So John the Baptist taught, "He that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth" (John iii. 31). "The people of the earth" was a phrase common amongst the Jews to designate the ignorant and degraded (see Lightfoot, vol. xi. p. 69). The

same learned author gives us another illustration : "The people of the earth" (that is, the Gentiles) "do not live;" and he remarks, "The Jews accounted the Gentiles as no other than dead" (vol. xii. p. 90). The apostle Paul adopts this Jewish phraseology to contrast the spiritual with the unrenewed man: "As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly" (1 Cor. xv. 48). These words are equivalent to those of our Saviour, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John iii. 6). To mortify the fleshly passions of man, and to originate within him the spiritual life, was the great purpose for which Christ came into the world; and the accomplishment of this purpose will be the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, to which St. Paul refers.

The fulfilment of this prediction is not to be limited to the overthrow of any one antichristian agency. We shall be safe in giving to these prophetic words a universal application. "Christ must reign until He shall have put ALL enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. xv. 25). "He will smite the earth"—not the material earth, but the ungodly world, all that is sensual and unrenewed—"with the rod of his mouth," by proclaiming to every creature under heaven that truth which

alone can make men free from sin; by which alone the human family can "be delivered from the bondage of corruption," and be brought into "the glorious liberty of the children of God." Lowth remarks on these words, "The earth here signifies the ungodly, who are elsewhere called the world" (see John vii. 7 and xvi. 8).

It ought to be observed that the apostle, like the prophet, adopts the Hebrew parallelism on this occasion:—

"Whom the Lord shall consume with the breath of his
mouth,
And shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."

It is well known that the second line of the Hebrew parallelism frequently, if not generally, repeats, with some variation, the sentiment expressed in the first line. Thus we may explain the second clause of the apostolic prediction by the first, and understand "the brightness of his coming" to be equivalent to his consuming "that wicked one by the breath of his mouth." The word of Christ which proceedeth out of his mouth shall accomplish that which He pleases. His Gospel, accompanied by the mighty power of his Spirit, is the divinely appointed agency for destroying the power of the wicked one, and of establishing the kingdom of truth and righteousness. Whatever is opposed to this kingdom

must be consumed and destroyed. It is anti-christian; and whether found in the Romish, the Greek, the Anglican, or any other Church, must be rooted up, together with all that is heathenish, sceptical, or superstitious. The voice which, on the morning of creation, commanded the light to shine out of darkness will dispel the moral and spiritual darkness in which mankind have so long been wandering; and as the material world was created by the word of his power, so by the same word will He "create all things new."

Intimation of this glorious result is plainly given in the words of Isaiah following the text under consideration. When the Lord Jesus shall have smitten the earth with "the rod of his mouth," "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isa. xi. 6). By which we are to understand that men who before were savage and cruel as lions and wolves, smitten by his Word, shall become gentle, kind, and loving. The reign of universal peace will attend the reign of universal righteousness, and then will be fulfilled the glorious prophecy, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. xi. 9).

Nothing so much aids us to interpret a prophecy as ascertaining what will result from its fulfilment. The antecedents and consequents, as well as the prediction itself, should be carefully studied.

From what has been said, we infer that "the brightness of the Lord's coming" does not necessarily involve any personal appearance, or any appeal to our organs of sense. For, mark, the revelation of "the man of sin" is described in phraseology similar, in some respects, to that predicting the coming of the Lord. Of the wicked one the apostle says, whose *coming* is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders," &c. (ver. 9). Thus, the manifestation of Divine power by the Son of man, and the manifestation of Satanic power by the man of sin, is in each case described as his coming. Note, also, that the wicked one is spoken of as to be *revealed*, the precise term applied by our Lord to his own coming: "The day when the Son of man is *revealed*" (Luke xvii. 30).

By the brightness of our Lord's coming, something vastly more important is indicated than any display of external glory. It directs our mental vision, not to the Lord "coming in the clouds of heaven," but to our glorified Redeemer seated at the right hand of God, and as having received of the Father "the promise of the Spirit," which

He sheds on his Church abundantly, to give efficacy to the preaching of his Gospel, and thus to create all things new, by making those who "have borne the image of the earthy to bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. xv. 49). In accomplishing this spiritual renovation, his doctrine will not always "drop as the rain, or his speech distil as the dew" (Deut. xxxii. 2). He will sometimes "smite the earth with the rod of his mouth," reminding us of the Divine interrogation, "Is not my word like a fire? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jer. xxiii. 10.)

VIII.

"Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."—REV. ii. 16.

The coming of Christ threatened in these words, addressed to the Church at Pergamos, was to execute judgment upon its inconsistent members. As then He walked, though unseen, "in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks," so now He visits and inspects his Churches. The *sword* of his mouth, like the *rod* of his mouth, is the symbol of his Word. In the symbolic vision of his glorified Redeemer granted to St. John, he beheld that "out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword" (Rev. i. 16). Elsewhere this is

called "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. vi. 17). In a subsequent part of the Apocalypse we read, "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations; and He shall rule them with a rod of iron;" *i.e.* with the sceptre of almighty power (Rev. xix. 15).

The Epistles to the seven Churches abound in anthropomorphic expressions. References to the *coming of the Lord* are very frequent; and they are usually of a threatening character. Not only is the Church at Pergamos thus threatened; the Church at Ephesus is likewise exhorted to repent, "or else" (says the Lord) "I will *come* unto thee, and remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev. ii. 5). The Church at Sardis is thus exhorted and threatened: "If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will *come* on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev. iii. 3).

To the Church at Thyatira the Lord says, "That which thou hast already, hold fast till I *come*;" referring, probably, to his coming to release them from their present conflict, and to bring them into their heavenly rest. The same interpretation may be given to the words addressed to the Church at Philadelphia: "Behold, I *come* quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. iii. 11).

To the anthropomorphic style of expression must be referred the following passages; they are also strikingly symbolical:—

“Who holdeth the seven stars in his right hand; who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks” (Rev. ii. 1). Christ’s presence with his Churches is a spiritual presence. We do not expect to *see* Him walking in our midst; yet He is as certainly present as if we beheld his form. “Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev. iii. 16). This is a striking figure to express Christ’s abhorrence of lukewarmness: as men nauseate and reject what is disagreeable to them, so the Lord nauseates and rejects those professors who, though bearing his name, are “neither cold nor hot.”

To the same Church He addresses words of encouragement, on condition of their repentance: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will *come* in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev. iii. 20). By these terms, expressive of familiar and friendly intercourse, our Lord declares that those who repent of their sins, however heinous, and receive Him with cordial affection, shall enjoy hallowed and habitual communion with Him. Their souls shall be nourished by “the bread of life;” and they shall realise the

fulfilment of his promise, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John vi. 35).

SECTION III.—THE COMING OF THE LORD TO RECEIVE BELIEVERS TO HIMSELF.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."—JOHN xiv. 3.

Our Lord's promise in these words, "I will come again, and receive you to myself," &c., is generally referred to his final coming to raise the dead and to judge the world. Those who adopt this interpretation must have overlooked the fact that this coming again of the Lord necessarily *precedes* the reception of his people to himself. Consequently, those who maintain that the coming spoken of refers to the day of final judgment must dismiss all hope of being received by their Saviour until that unknown day shall arrive—a most melancholy prospect for those who have fixed their supreme affections on Him "who loved them, and gave himself for them!"

Happily this conclusion is not less opposed to the teaching of Scripture than it is to our own Christian instincts. Every believer knows intuitively that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 8). Our

Saviour did not say to the dying thief, "When I come again to judge all mankind, you shall be received by me into paradise;" but "Verily I say unto thee, *To-day* shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke xxiii. 43). St. Paul would not have cherished "a desire to depart," had he not known that immediately on his departure he would "be with Christ:" it was this which made him feel it to be "far better" (Phil. i. 23). It was the full assurance that, immediately on the dissolution of the "earthly house of this tabernacle," he would realise the fulfilment of his Master's promise, "Where I am, there shall my servant be," that made death an object of desire. When the martyr Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," he expected, no doubt, an immediate answer to his earnest supplication. But if we interpret the coming of which our Lord speaks as referring to his final coming to judgment, it follows that neither Stephen nor any other believer has been "received" by Him since the day that He expired on the cross; for the coming must precede the reception.

We conclude, therefore, that whatever ulterior event may be referred to in these words, "I will come again, and receive you to myself," they have a most important fulfilment in the experience of every believer when called to leave this world. The Lord Jesus, by whom both his soul

and body have been redeemed, *comes* to convey his servant from earth to the "place which He has prepared for him in his Father's house" (John xiv.).

This most encouraging truth is well sustained by other parts of Scripture. Our Lord is there called "the Prince of Life" (Acts iii. 15). Like the uncreated Father, He "hath life in himself." and He gives to his servants "eternal life" (John v. 26; x. 27). By his death He "destroyed him who before had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. ii. 14), and has thus "delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (ver. 15). He, and He only, has "the keys of death and of Hades," or the world of spirits (Rev. i. 18). "He openeth, and no man shutteth: He shutteth, and no man openeth" (Rev. iii. 7). This opening the gate of death to admit his servants into everlasting life is most appropriately termed his *coming*. It is the exercise of a power exclusively his. The conviction of this takes away "the sting of death," and converts the curse into a blessing. Believers are not seized on by "the king of terrors," but visited by the loving Saviour, and conducted to their eternal home by Him "who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel" (2 Tim. i. 10).

In confirmation of these views, the words of Dr. Macknight may be quoted. In his essay on "The Various Comings of Christ mentioned in Scripture," he says, "There is likewise a *day* or *coming of Christ* spoken of by Paul, different from his coming to judgment, and from both his former comings. I mean his releasing his people from their present state of trial by death." And he quotes, in support of this view, the following passages:—"Who also will confirm you until the end, without accusation, in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. i. 8). "He who hath begun in you a good work will be completing it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 6). "May your whole person, the spirit, the soul, and the body, be preserved unblamable unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. v. 23). It is true the release of Christ's servants from their present trial by death is accomplished, for the most part, by no extraordinary display of his power; yet it is fitly enough called his *day* and his *coming*, because, by his appointment, all men die, and by his power each is carried "to his own place" after death. Besides, his servants in particular being put on their duty, like soldiers, must remain at their several posts till released by their commander; and, when He releases them, He is fitly said to *come* for that purpose."

The teaching of Scripture on this subject is

abundantly confirmed by the manifest experience of believers. Those accustomed to visit the death-beds of departing Christians must have frequently observed the clearness with which the fact of Christ's personal coming is apprehended; the tenacity with which it is held, and the support and comfort it imparts. Facts sometimes prove to be the strongest arguments, especially when, under given circumstances, they very frequently recur. No apology, therefore, is needed for introducing the following:—

A dear Christian child, twelve years of age, was dying of diphtheria. She was fully conscious that the time of her departure was at hand; so were her distressed parents. Her mother, to encourage and to comfort her, said, "Jesus will send his angels to conduct you to heaven." The dying child turned to her mother and said, with earnestness, "No, mamma, He will *come* himself."

A young English soldier, wounded in the Crimean war, was visited by a Christian surgeon, who, in addition to his professional services, spoke briefly a word of kindness, and left with him a small hymn-book. About a fortnight later, on visiting his patient, he found him much worse; the wounded soldier told his friend how he had been taught in a Sunday school at home, how he had forsaken the counsels of his teacher,

and how he had led an ungodly life until wounded and taken into the hospital. Whilst on his sick couch he looked into the hymn-book given him on his friend's first visit. There he found many of the hymns he had learned in the Sabbath school; he described his feelings when convinced of the evil of his course; he told how he was led to repentance, and how he had found peace in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour; and then, with great emotion, the dying soldier clasped his hands and exclaimed, "Oh, Jesus, I knew that thou wouldst *come* at last!" Christ had come at his conversion; at his death He came again to receive him to himself.

The following extract from the account of the death of a dear Christian child is taken from a recent publication:—"Propped up on the pillows, she lay with flushed face, the thin white fingers resting on the little money-box" (for missions) —"an angel already in purity and celestial beauty. As the breath grew quicker, her lips moved. All leaned to catch her words She whispered, 'He is coming now! Dear Jesus!' and the eyes were fixed as a smile lit up all her face, and she added, 'I am coming.' The head fell upon the father's shoulder; the soft, bright hair hung over his arm; and little Marian was with Jesus."—*Mister Horn and his Friends*, by Mark Guy Pearse.

Examples might be multiplied, but these are sufficient for illustrating the views set forth. The experience of believers may be expected to correspond with the truths revealed in God's Word. When our views of Divine truth are sustained by experience so marked, we feel greatly confirmed in the interpretation we have adopted.

SECTION IV.—THE COMING OF THE LORD TO RAISE
THE DEAD, AND TO JUDGE THE WORLD IN
RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The doctrine of the final judgment, though clearly revealed in the New Testament, is but indistinctly referred to in the Old. Those predictions, so frequent in the Psalms, which represent the Lord as "coming to judge the earth," must apply to the establishment of his spiritual kingdom, because all nature, animate and inanimate, is invoked at his advent to rejoice before the Lord (Ps. xevi. 9—13). It is evident, therefore, that this coming is not for destruction, but for salvation. By the establishment of his kingdom the moral world will be renovated, and a corresponding improvement will take place in the material world: this will come as a natural consequence of the universal reign of righteousness and of peace. When these prevail, "then

shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us" (Ps. lxxvii.).

The vision of Daniel (vii. 9—12), in which he beheld the "thrones set up"—not cast down, as in our version—"and the Ancient of days did sit," is thought by some to be a description of the day of final judgment. But it appears from the subsequent verses to refer to God's judgments on the nations hostile to the kingdom of Christ, which were to be destroyed in order that "all nations and languages should serve Him." Dr. Boothroyd says, "This cannot refer to the last final judgment, but to one in God's providence, by which the last empire is judged, and the kingdom given to the Son of man." Dr. Adam Clarke writes to the same purport: "This is not spoken of the final judgment, but of that which He was to execute upon this *fourth beast*—the Roman empire; and the little boasting horn, which is a part of the fourth beast, and must fall when the other falls." The popular error of interpreting this vision as referring to the day of final judgment has arisen from not connecting the eleventh and twelfth verses with the ninth and tenth. Disregard of the context is a very fruitful source of error.

A plainer reference to the resurrection and the final judgment is found in the last chapter of Daniel, third verse: "And many of them that

sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake ; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." On these words Dr. Boothroyd thus comments :—" Either dead really or figuratively. Like the witnesses in the Revelation, it may mean the latter ; but the second clause rather leads us to conclude that the former is intended, as the good and bad are to awake—those to the enjoyment of eternal life, and these to everlasting shame and contempt."

But however indistinct may be the Old Testament allusions to the resurrection preparatory to judgment, the doctrine is not only most clearly asserted in the New, but its truth is based upon the most ancient of the inspired writings. When the Sadducees tried to perplex our Lord on the subject, He declared that their error resulted from ignorance of their own Scriptures. " Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God ?" And He added, " As touching the dead, that they rise : have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living : ye therefore do greatly err " (Mark xii. 24—27). And that this was the general belief of the Jewish people appears from St. Paul's statement before Agrippa,

in which he not only declared his own hope in the promise made of God unto the fathers, but adds, "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come" (Acts xxvi. 7). And, in writing to the Hebrews, he assumes the belief in this truth to be so indisputable, that he classes it amongst "the first principles of the doctrine of Christ" (Heb. vi. 1, 2).

This extraordinary manifestation of Divine power in raising the dead is termed in Scripture "the coming of the Lord," just as his bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly was foretold as his "*coming*." The reason of this has been already stated, namely, because the result is as manifestly the exercise of almighty power as if the Divine Agent had been seen performing it. Like other prophecies, this great event is pictured before our mental vision by language highly symbolical, the precise meaning of which cannot be ascertained without careful and persevering study.

Many passages of Scripture, supposed to refer to the coming of the Lord for final judgment, have been already shown to apply rather to that great revolution by which the Mosaic dispensation was abolished, in order that Christ's kingdom might be established in its stead. The two Epistles to the Thessalonian Church contain many references to "the coming of the Lord:" some of these

point unquestionably to his final coming, others refer apparently to some antecedent event. Extreme difficulty will be found in ascertaining precisely the meaning of many passages in these Epistles; and all our efforts may result in the conviction expressed by the late Dr. Thomas Arnold, that there are some texts of Scripture that will never be fully understood.

Nor need we be surprised at this; for it is evident that the Church at Thessalonica itself, though founded and taught by an inspired apostle, had misunderstood both his oral and his epistolary teachings; also that these misapprehensions had given occasion to false and fraudulent teachers to pervert these converts, both from Christian doctrine and practice. These false teachers asserted that the day of the Lord (meaning thereby, probably, the day of final judgment) was at hand. Error in doctrine generally leads to error in practice: it did so in this case, for we read in the Second Epistle an injunction to the Church to withdraw themselves from every brother that walketh disorderly: we read also of those who would not work, and of those who were busybodies (chap. iii.). These evils had infected a Church to which the Gospel had come, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance"—a Church whose members had been held forth by its apostolic

founder as “ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thess. i.). This serious declension appears to have resulted from false notions respecting the coming of the Lord: correct notions would have had an opposite effect on their Christian life. Doctrines, like characters, must be tested according to our Saviour’s rule—“By their fruits ye shall know them.” Notions which make men idle, disorderly, and busybodies, and so tend to the disintegration of a Church, cannot be in harmony with the mind of Christ; they have on them the broad stamp of error. “The truth as it is in Jesus,” welcomed and cherished in the heart, will make its possessor humble, loving, earnest, and ready unto every good word and work: it will promote unity, not produce separation.

The importance, therefore, of knowing “the mind of the Spirit,” so far as this has been revealed to us, is obvious. False notions infecting the Christian Church now will produce the same fruit as in the primitive Church. So sensible was Dr. Macknight of the importance and of the difficulty of understanding some portions of these Epistles, that he prefaces the second of Thessalonians with a discourse on *the different comings of Christ spoken of in the New Testament*.

The attentive perusal of this essay will repay the reader.

“There are other comings of Christ spoken of in Scripture besides his coming to judgment; and there are other things besides this mundane system, whose end is there foretold; and it is of these matters the apostles speak, when they represent *the day of their Master*, and *the end of all things*, as at hand.”

First, then, in the prophetic writings of the Jews (2 Sam. xxii. 10—12; Ps. xcvi. 2—5; Isa. xix. 1), great exertions of the Divine power, whether for the salvation or destruction of nations, are called *the coming, the appearance, the presence of God*. Hence it was natural for the apostles, who were Jews, to call any signal and evident interposition of Christ, as governor of the world, for the accomplishment of his purposes, *his coming* and *his day*. Accordingly, those exertions of his power and providence whereby He destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, abrogated the Mosaic institutions, and established the Gospel, are called by the apostles *his coming* and *day*, not only in allusion to the ancient prophetic language, but because Christ himself, in his prophecy concerning these events (recorded Matt. xxiv.), hath termed them *the coming of the Son of man*, in allusion to the prophecy of Daniel, of which his own prophecy is an explication, “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came in the clouds of heaven, and

came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. vii. 13, 14). This prophecy the Jewish doctors, with one consent, interpreted of the Messiah, and of that temporal dominion which they expected was to be given Him. Further, they supposed that He would erect that temporal kingdom by great and visible exertions of his power for the destruction of his enemies. But they little suspected that themselves were of the number of those enemies whom He was to destroy, and that his kingdom was to be established on the ruin of their State. Yet that was the true meaning of *the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven*. For while the Jewish nation continued in Judea, and observed the institutions of Moses, they violently opposed the preaching of the Gospel, by which Messiah was to reign over all people, nations, and languages. Wherefore, that the everlasting kingdom might be effectually established, it was necessary that Jerusalem and the Jewish State should be destroyed by the Roman armies. Now, since our Lord foretold this sad catastrophe in the words

of the prophet Daniel (Matt. xxiv. 30), "*And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory ;*" and, after describing every particular of it with the greatest exactness, seeing He told his disciples (ver. 34), "*This generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled ;*" can there be any doubt that the apostles (who, when they wrote their Epistles, certainly understood the true import of this prophecy), by *their Master's coming*, and by *the end of all things*, which they represent as at hand, meant his coming to destroy Jerusalem, and to put an end to the institutions of Moses? It is no objection to this that when the apostles heard Christ declare, "*There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down,*" they connected the end of the world, or age, with that event (Matt. xxiv. 3). "*Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?*" For, as the Jewish doctors divided the duration of the world into three ages—the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the Messiah—the apostles knew that the age under the law was to end when the age under Messiah began. And therefore, by *the end of the age*, they meant, even at that time, not the end of the world, but the end of the age under the law, in which the Jews had been greatly oppressed

by the heathen. And although they did not then understand the purpose for which their Master was come, nor the true nature of his kingdom, nor suspect that He was to make any change in the institutions of Moses; yet, when they wrote their Epistles, being illuminated by the Holy Ghost, they certainly knew that the institutions of Moses were to be abolished, and that their Master's kingdom was not a temporal, but a spiritual dominion, in which all people, nations, and languages were to be governed, not by external force, but by the operation of truth upon their minds, through the preaching of the Gospel.

“Further, that the apostles, by the coming of Christ, which they represented as at hand when they wrote their Epistles, meant his coming to establish his spiritual kingdom over all people, nations, and languages, and not his coming to put an end to this mundane system, is evident from what Christ himself told them (Matt. xvi. 28), ‘*There be some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*’ And agreeably with this account of the coming of Christ, and of the end of all things, I observe, that every passage of their Epistles in which the apostles have spoken of these things as at hand, may, with the greatest propriety, be interpreted of Christ's coming to

establish his everlasting kingdom over all people, nations, and languages, by destroying Jerusalem, putting an end to the law of Moses, and spreading the Gospel through the world. Thus (1 Cor. x. 11), ‘*These things are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come,*’ means, the end of the age under the Law, and the beginning of the age under Messiah. (Phil. iv. 5), ‘*Let your moderation be known unto all men : the Lord is nigh ;*’ namely, to destroy the Jews, your greatest adversaries. (Heb. ix. 26), ‘*But now once, at the conclusion of the ages,*’ the Jewish Jubilees, ‘*He hath been manifested to abolish sin-offering by the sacrifice of himself.*’ (Heb. x. 25), ‘*Exhorting one another daily, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching :*’ i.e. the day of Christ’s coming to destroy Jerusalem and the Jewish State. (Ver. 37), ‘*For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come, and will not tarry.*’ (James v. 7), ‘*Wherefore, be patient, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.*’ (Ver. 8), ‘*Be ye also patient ; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord*’ (to destroy the Jews, your persecutors) *draweth nigh.*’ (Ver. 9), ‘*Behold the Judge standeth before the door.*’ (1 Peter iv. 7), ‘*The end of all things*’ (the end of Jerusalem, and of the Temple, and of all the Mosaic institutions) *hath approached. Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.*’ (1 John ii. 18), ‘*Young children, it is the last*

hour' of the Jewish State; '*and as ye have heard,*' from Christ, in his prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, '*that the Antichrist cometh, so now there are many Antichrists, whence we know that it is the last hour*' of the Jewish State.

"2nd. There is another coming of Christ spoken of by the apostles, different likewise from his coming to judge the world, and to put an end to the present state of things; namely, his coming to destroy *the man of sin* (2 Thess. ii. 8). '*Him the Lord will consume by the breath of his mouth, and will destroy by the bright shining of his coming.*' This singular event, which will contribute greatly to the honour of God and to the good of his Church, is, agreeably to the Scripture style, fitly called '*the coming of the Lord; and the bright shining of his coming.*' But this coming is nowhere, in Scripture, said to be at hand.

"3rd. There is likewise *a day, or coming of Christ*, spoken of by Paul, different from his coming to judgment, and from both the former comings: I mean, his releasing his people from their present trial by death" (already quoted and considered, p. 127).

"4th. Besides all these, there is a day, or *coming of the Lord*, to judge the world, and to put an end to the present state of things. . . . Now, this being a real personal appearance of Christ in

the body, it is, more properly than any other of his comings, called *the day* and coming of Christ. And the purpose of it being more important than those of his other comings, the exertions of his power for accomplishing them will be more signal and glorious."

We shall now proceed to examine some passages in these remarkable Epistles.

I.

The apostle, in his introduction, reminds the Thessalonians how, through his preaching, they had "turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven" (1 Thess. i. 9, 10).

The question we have to consider is, what ideas the apostle himself intended to convey to these believers, by directing them to "wait for the Son of God from heaven."

Dr. Macknight judiciously remarks that, by "worshipping the living and true God," these Thessalonian Christians were distinguished from the idolatrous heathen; and by "waiting for his Son from heaven," they were distinguished from the unbelieving Jews.

The consideration of the circumstances under which this Church had been so recently formed will throw light on the Epistle addressed to them by its founder. In the Acts of the Apostles

(chap. xvii.) we read that Paul came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: the apostle, according to his custom of preaching the Gospel to them first, attended their meetings, “and for three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, explaining them, and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is the Christ.” The result of his preaching was that many of the Jews themselves believed in Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Saviour: they consorted with Paul and Silas; also of the devout Greeks (who had been previously converted from idolatry to Judaism) a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. This success moved the unbelieving Jews with envy; and, in order to counteract the influence of the apostle’s preaching, they took unto themselves “certain lewd fellows of the baser sort,” set all the city in an uproar, assaulted the house of Jason, hoping there to find Paul and Silas; but, not finding them, “they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These men, who have turned the world upside down, are come hither also, whom Jason hath received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another King, one Jesus.” The same argument which had prevailed with Pilate to condemn our Lord

was now urged against his servants. The result of this persecution was that the people and the rulers of the city were troubled ; and the brethren, alarmed for the safety of Paul and Silas, immediately sent them away by night unto Berea. On arriving there, nothing daunted, they went into the synagogue of the Jews, obeying their Lord's injunction, " When they persecute you in one city, flee ye unto another." Here they found a more promising audience than at Thessalonica ; the Bereans " received the word with all readiness of mind," and they received it not blindly, but intelligently ; for they searched the Scriptures daily, to ascertain whether the preaching of their new teachers was in harmony with the inspired Word of God. Consequently, many of the Jews in Berea believed ; and not the Jews only, but " also of honourable women who were Greeks, and of men, not a few." Tidings of this reaching Thessalonica, the Jews of that city were again inflamed with envy and rage ; they hasted to Berea, and there stirred up the people against the apostles. So bitter was their persecution, that the brethren determined immediately to send away Paul, to go as it were by sea ; whilst Silas and Timothy, being less prominent than the apostle, abode still in Berea.

The bitter persecutions to which Paul and his companions were subjected appear to have been

a source of great perplexity to the Thessalonian Church, many of whom had but recently been converted from heathenism. They thought, and very naturally, that the living God, being infinitely superior to the gods of the heathen, would protect his servants against the enmity they incurred by preaching his Gospel. St. Paul, aware of their perplexity, sent Timothy to establish them, and to comfort them concerning their faith, lest they should be moved or disquieted by these afflictions; and he reminds them that he had told them before that he should suffer tribulation. No doubt he had been prompted to do this by the words of his Master to Ananias, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts ix. 16).

When the apostle, during the three Sabbath days he was in Thessalonica, reasoned with the Jews out of the Scriptures, explaining them, and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and have risen from the dead, and that Jesus, whom he preached to them, was the Christ, there can be no doubt that the prejudiced and unbelieving Jews opposed his teaching by the arguments so popular with their nation. "Our Messiah, it is foretold, will come as a mighty conqueror, to subdue all the enemies of God's people: He will sit on the throne of his father David: all nations shall fall down before Him;

all kings shall serve Him ; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. The Jesus of Nazareth whom Paul proclaims as the Messiah was the reverse of all this. He was poor ; He was weak ; He was condemned by the Sanhedrim as an impostor and blasphemer ; and He was crucified as a malefactor between two thieves ! How can this be the glorious Messiah spoken of by all our prophets ? ”

The apostle would probably counteract the force of these arguments by referring to the miracles performed by our Lord, which bore witness that the Father had sent Him ; he would also dwell upon his resurrection from the dead, by which He was “ declared to be the Son of God with power ” (Rom. i. 4) ; but he would not confine himself to arguments of a retrospective character. Like Stephen, he would refer to those remarkable prophecies uttered by our Lord at the close of his earthly mission, and carefully recorded by three evangelists, foretelling the destruction, during that present generation, of Jerusalem, and the abolishing of the Temple service, with the whole Mosaic economy. When He should thus be “ revealed from heaven, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of his Son,” the fulfilment of his predictions will be the most conclusive proof that He was what He had when on earth claimed to be—“ the Son of David ”

and "the Son of God" the Messiah to whom all power had been committed both in heaven and earth. Then would be fulfilled his words, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi. 64). The effect of the apostle's teaching would be not only to confirm the faith of the Thessalonian Church, but also to inspire them with hope. The Jews might "breathe out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord;" but their time was short, "the Lord was at hand," "the Judge was at the door." The moment would then arrive, anticipated in the Saviour's discourse: "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke xxi. 28); *i.e.* as Dr. S. Clarke expounds these words, "Then take comfort, and expect with confidence that the time of your deliverance, and of the firm and universal establishment of my Church, draweth nigh." With such prospects opened to them, the youthful Church at Thessalonica might derive great comfort, and be established in faith, by an intelligent apprehension of the apostle's exhortation "to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. i. 10). The event which was to afford them relief was to take

place within twenty years. It would have yielded but little comfort to the persecuted Christians at Thessalonica to have had their minds directed to an event which should transpire in two or three thousand years. The fulfilment of their Lord's prediction respecting his "coming" would secure their deliverance from the false teaching and the bitter hostility of their persecutors; and, therefore, they were taught "to wait for Him." The attitude of their minds might be well expressed by the words of the psalmist, "I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait; and in his word do I hope" (Ps. cxxx.). The fulfilment or non-fulfilment of his predictions would determine whether Christ was what He had himself asserted, the Messiah, sent of God; or whether He was what the chief priests and scribes had pronounced Him to be, an impostor and a blasphemer. Well might the early Church "long for his appearing!"

"A personal advent of the Redeemer," says Mr. Robertson, "is one which can be perceived by foes, as well as recognised by friends. The destruction of Jerusalem, recognised by the heathen themselves as judgment, is called in the Bible a coming of Christ. In the Deluge, in the destruction of the cities of the plain, in the confusion of tongues, God is said to have come down to visit the earth."—*F. W. Robertson's Sermons*, vol. i. p. 155.

II.

In his Second Epistle to the same Church the apostle commends the Thessalonian Christians for their patience and faith in all the persecutions and tribulations which they endured; he declares that God will in righteousness recompense tribulation to those who troubled them; and he adds, "To you who are troubled *rest with us*, WHEN the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. i. 7—10).

The almost universal interpretation of this passage refers its fulfilment to the day of final judgment, when the wicked shall be banished for ever from the presence of God, and the righteous enter into that rest which was prepared for them before the foundation of the world. Is this the meaning of the apostle? A careful examination of his words may convince us that they are susceptible of a different interpretation, and one more in harmony with the object he had in view in thus writing to the Thessalonian Christians.

1st. Let us inquire, Who are the persons to whom God will in his righteousness recompense tribulation? Evidently they were those who at the time persecuted the Thessalonian Church—"tribulation to them that trouble you." These were, pre-eminently, the unbelieving Jews, of whom St. Paul had said, in his First Epistle, that they had "both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak unto the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess. ii. 15, 16). Might not the apostle refer expressly to "this wicked generation," when he said to the Thessalonian Church, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you?"

2nd. The revelation of "the Lord Jesus from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," may have reference to his own prediction, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." The "flaming fire" may refer to that most destructive element by which Jerusalem and the Temple were to be consumed; and the "mighty angels" may have

been the executioners of his judgments, as in his coming to destroy the world by the Deluge He is represented as "coming with ten thousand of his saints" (Jude 14).

A passage in the prophecy of Amos throws light on the words of the apostle, as it illustrates the figurative use of *fire*, the most potent agent of destruction: "And, behold, the Lord God called to contend by *fire*, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part" (vii. 4). Lowth thus comments on these words:—"This, in the opinion of most expositors, denotes the invasion of Tiglath-Pileser, King of Assyria, who carried a great part of Israel away captive (2 Kings xv. 29), and so was properly represented by a raging fire which consumed the sea by turning it into vapours, and then devoured a great part of the land" (Lowth on Amos vii. 4). The sea is the symbol of multitudes of people (see Rev. xvii. 15).

It should be noted that the clause, "in flaming fire," is connected, not with the antecedent, but with the subsequent clause; the apostle does not say that the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, but that He shall take vengeance in flaming fire on them who obey not his Gospel. Apply the apostle's words thus to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the interpretation will harmonize with

many ancient prophecies, and will also accord with historic facts. It is well known that Titus was most anxious to save the Temple; but a Roman soldier, contrary to his commander's orders, threw in a flaming torch, by which the glorious edifice was set on fire, and utterly consumed, in spite of the repeated efforts of the general to extinguish the flames.

Observe the nature of the comfort proffered by the apostle to these persecuted believers, and the time when this comfort should be realised by them. His words are, "To you who are troubled, *rest with us*;" and this rest was to be enjoyed "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven," &c. If this revelation was not to take place until the final day of judgment, the prospect of "rest" was very remote; but if it was to take place shortly, by the Lord Jesus fulfilling his promise of coming in the clouds of heaven to destroy the bitter enemies of his Church, the prospect of "rest" was near, and consequently very cheering. The comfort held out to the Thessalonian Church was the near approach of relief from persecution, this relief being consequent on the destruction of their antichristian enemies. Our Lord himself had spoken of this destruction in similar terms: "Even so shall it be when the Son of man is *revealed*" (Luke xvii. 30). Probably the apostle had these words in mind in

writing to the Thessalonians, when he spoke of "the Lord Jesus being *revealed* from heaven with his mighty angels, and in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel," &c.

3rd. Consider the punishment to be inflicted. They were to be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Let us examine some passages in the Old Testament in which similar phraseology is used. The first we shall notice is in Gen. iv. 16, where we read that Cain "went out from *the presence of the Lord.*" Bishop Patrick, having remarked that Cain went "not voluntarily, but by the force of the Divine curse," thus comments on the phrase, "from the presence of the Lord:"—"There was a Divine glory, called by the Jews the Schechinah, which appeared from the beginning; the sight of which Cain never after this enjoyed, but was banished from it." Where the Divine glory which indicated "the presence of the Lord" was manifested, there God was worshipped. Cain was driven from this sacred place, and became an idolater! It is not improbable that when "Adam and his wife hid themselves from *the presence of the Lord God* amongst the trees of the garden," the sacred writer records the fact that, whereas they had hitherto gladly worshipped in the spot made

sacred by the token of God's presence, the consciousness of guilt disqualified them for spiritual worship. The Schechinah no longer appeared to them as a brilliant light, but as "a consuming fire."

We read of Jonah that, when commanded to go to Nineveh to preach God's Word, he "fled *from the presence of the Lord*;" i.e. he forsook the Holy Land, in which God's presence was manifested, and in which his worship was maintained. The same idea is expressed in the complaint of David, that his enemies had driven him out from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, "Go, serve other gods" (1 Sam. xxvi. 19). The Jews believed all other lands beside Palestine to be unclean, and that the very dust of them conveyed defilement. To live or to die in such lands was regarded as a calamity. When necessarily absent from "the inheritance of the Lord," they used in their devotions, like Daniel, to pray with their faces turned towards Jerusalem.

In the Psalms frequent mention is made of "*the presence of the Lord*," usually referring to the manifestation of God's presence on Mount Sinai, when He gave directions respecting the manner in which his people were to worship Him. Thus we read, "O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; the earth shook,

the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel" (Ps. lxxviii. 7, 8). Again: "The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord" (Ps. xcvi. 5); and once more, "Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with thanksgiving" (Ps. c. 2). Solomon's Temple was consecrated by the presence of the Lord, for we read that "the cloud filled the house of the Lord," a token recognised by the devout monarch, and which prompted him to say, "The Lord hath said that He would dwell in the thick darkness" (1 Kings viii. 10—12).

This presence of the Lord in the place where his name was recorded was the most prominent idea in the mind of the devout Israelite in worship. To be driven from the sacred soil was to be driven from "the presence of the Lord." Hence the exquisite tenderness in the promise conveyed to the exiles in Chaldea, "Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, yet will I be unto them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come" (Ezek. xi. 16).

Keeping in mind that "*the presence of the Lord*" was so inseparably connected in the Jewish mind with the public worship of God, may not the apostle, when speaking of those who should "be punished with everlasting destruction *from the presence of the Lord*," refer to the entire abolition

of the Mosaic ritual, and to the utter destruction of the Temple and city of God? The false teachers, by asserting the perpetuity of these divinely appointed institutions, opposed the Gospel, "contradicting" the apostle's words, and "blaspheming" the Lord Jesus. The apostle comforts and sustains the faith of his converts by assuring them that Christ would come (as Daniel had foretold, and as He himself had promised) "in the clouds of heaven," that He would then "take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of his Son," and that then their persecutors would be "destroyed with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord;" *i.e.* the Jewish ritual and the Mosaic institutions should be entirely abolished, the Temple itself should be utterly destroyed, and its worship never again be re-established.

It is very remarkable that the delay of the desolation of Samaria and the kingdom of Israel is thus recorded: "The Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion upon them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither *cast He them from his presence as yet*" (2 Kings xiii. 23). It is also remarkable that the first destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar is described by the prophet Jeremiah in terms similar to those used by the apostle Paul: "*The Lord*

cast them out from his presence" (lii. 3). This, however, was not "an *everlasting* destruction from the presence of the Lord," for, after seventy years' captivity, the Jews returned, and rebuilt the Temple, which was sanctified by the presence of the Lord (see Haggai ii. 4, 5, 9). But the destruction by the Romans, to which the apostle appears to refer, was to be an "everlasting destruction:" the Temple was never to be rebuilt, its worship never to be restored (see also Jer. xxiii. 39, 40).

The judgment thus foretold by the apostle corresponds with our Lord's prediction expressed in the parable of the husbandmen: "Therefore, I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. xxi. 43). This approaching destruction, whilst affording hope and comfort to the persecuted disciples, was most intolerable to the unbelieving Jews. When our Lord foretold it, "they sought to lay hands on Him;" and when He more fully declared it, they pronounced Him "guilty of death." When St. Stephen preached that Jesus of Nazareth would come to destroy Jerusalem, and change the customs which Moses had delivered to them, they stoned him to death (Acts vi., vii.). And when St. Paul preached, in the synagogue of Thessalonica, that Christ was the promised Messiah, the

King who should rule over all nations, the Jews in the city rose in tumult, and assaulted the house where they supposed the apostle was, who, to escape their violence, fled by night to Berea; but there his persecutors again confronted him, and he was compelled, in order to avoid their fury, to fly to Athens (Acts xvii.).

This coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven to accomplish his own predictions by executing terrible judgment on those by whom He had been condemned and executed, as it was a declaration, not only to the Jewish nation, but to the whole world, that He had been exalted to the "right hand of the Majesty in the heavens," might well be described by the apostle as his coming "to be glorified by his saints, and admired by all them that believe" (2 Thess. i. 10, Boothroyd's version). His enemies were confounded, and clothed with shame; they were scattered; and the Divine word to Messiah was fulfilled, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Ps. cx. 1).

How far the coming of the Lord to execute on Jerusalem the judgments He had foretold may be typical of his final coming to "judge the world in righteousness," may be profitably considered and solemnly meditated on. However great the differences in circumstances may be, we may be fully assured that precisely the same principles

of eternal rectitude will determine the proceedings of that solemn day. The sins which banished from the presence of the Lord the Jews, his chosen people, will separate us also from Him who "is light, and in whom is no darkness at all" (1 John i. 5).

The remarks of a very profound thinker on this destruction of Jerusalem deserve serious consideration:—"It is impossible to look at it without perceiving that there is also something farther included: we shall understand it by turning to the elucidation given by our Lord himself. When the apostles asked, 'Where shall all these things be?' his reply was, in effect, this: 'Ask you where? I tell you, nowhere in particular, or rather everywhere; for wheresoever there is corruption there will be destruction; where the carcass is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.' So that this first coming of the Son of man to judgment was the type, the specimen, of what shall be hereafter."—*F. W. Robertson's Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 295.

III.

"For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and

remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent " (i.e. take precedence of) "*them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*"—1 THESS. iv. 13—18.

Of all the statements of Scripture respecting the coming of the Lord, none is so difficult to comprehend as this, whether it be understood literally, or whether it be interpreted as language highly figurative.

On some points all will be agreed. 1st. That the apostle is speaking of the coming of the Lord to raise the dead, and to judge all mankind.

2nd. That his object is to comfort the members of the Thessalonian Church who had suffered bereavement, and who felt anxious about the condition of their friends in the future state. This anxiety had probably been produced by the false assertions of the Judaising teachers, who taught that none but those who obeyed the law of Moses had any hope for the world to come.

3rd. That the essence of the comfort administered by the apostle is found in his closing words : " So shall we ever be with the Lord." The descent of the Lord from heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of

God are mere accessories. The grand source of comfort is in the realisation of our Saviour's promise, "Where I am, there shall my servant be" (John xii. 26).

Whatever differences, therefore, may exist as to the interpretation of the whole passage, these are confined to the circumstances antecedent to the accomplishment of every Christian's supreme desire, "So shall we ever be with the Lord."

Those who adopt a strictly literal interpretation expect to see the Lord himself, in his human body, descending from heaven with a shout; they expect to hear the voice of the archangel, and to hear the trumpet of God blown. But if any one tries, in imagination, to realise these events, difficulties innumerable and insurmountable rise up in prospect before him. If a personal appearance is intended by the apostle, this must be in some limited space, for a material body cannot occupy more than one place at one and the same time. This bodily manifestation must be made in a certain latitude and a certain longitude. Whilst in this position, the Supreme Judge could be seen only by a fractional part of the twelve hundred millions who inhabit our globe. But if, as according to these interpreters, "every eye shall see Him," it follows that either every member of the human family must go to this particular locality, or He who "comes in the clouds of heaven" must

continue his ærial course from nation to nation, from continent to continent—we will suppose from Asia to Africa, thence to Europe, then across the Atlantic to America, and again across the Pacific to the eastern portion of Asia! During this progress it is supposed that all who have died in faith are to be raised; and, subsequently, those “who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall be caught up together with them, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Some sincere Christians think that the language of the apostle, like that usually employed in prophecy, is highly symbolic. This being the case, it follows that a literal interpretation of symbolic language must be false, and may lead to the greatest absurdities.

We have, on more than one occasion, shown that in Scripture language any special manifestation of Divine power is described as “the coming of the Lord.” In the passage under consideration we are told that “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,” &c. Does this necessarily imply any personal appearance? Let us inquire whether, in the Old Testament, any similar language is used, and in what sense such language is to be understood. In the Psalm composed by David when “the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all

his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul" (2 Sam. xxii. 1), he records that, in answer to his prayer, "God bowed the heavens and came down" (ver. 10). No one supposes that there was any visible appearance of David's great Deliverer; but the manifestation of Divine power in saving and exalting his servant demonstrated that He was present actively, though unseen. Again, Isaiah, supplicating God on behalf of his people, says, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest *come down*" (lxiv. 1). The prophet did not expect, in answer to his prayer, any visible and personal appearance of the Deity; all he sought was the display of his redeeming power. To "bow the heavens and come down," "to rend the heavens and come down," and to "descend from heaven," are phrases so much alike, that we may safely interpret the words of the apostle as being equivalent to the similar expressions used by the psalmist and the prophet.

The incident connected with this prophecy, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven *with a shout*," demands consideration. Can we find, in the Old Testament, any occasion on which the same expression is applied to the Deity? and can we ascertain in what way it received its accomplishment?

The psalmist thus records, in language emi-

nently anthropomorphic, the interposition of God on behalf of his people :—

“ Then the Lord awaked, as one out of sleep ;
And like a mighty man that SHOUTETH, by reason of
wine ” (Ps. lxxviii. 65).

The prophet Isaiah says—

“ Jehovah shall march forth, like a hero ;
Like a mighty warrior shall He rouse his vengeance :
He shall cry aloud ; He shall SHOUT amain ;
He shall exert his strength against his enemies.”
(Isa. xlii. 13, Lowth’s version.)

This highly figurative language is adopted to convey the idea that, as a mighty hero shouts when destroying his enemies, so God would accomplish the destruction of Israel’s foes by his almighty power, though unseen and unheard.

In similar language the prophet Jeremiah describes the exertions of Divine power for the deliverance of Israel :—

“ The Lord shall roar from on high ;
And utter his voice from his holy habitation ;
He shall mightily roar upon his habitation ;
He shall give a *shout*, as they that tread the grapes ;
Against all the inhabitants of the earth ”
(Jer. xxv. 30).

On these words Lowth remarks, “ God speaks by his judgments ; and these, when very terrible,

may be fitly compared to the roaring of a lion, which strikes consternation into those who hear it." On the words, "He shall give a *shout*," he thus comments:—"Like a leader or general he shall encourage them to the onset on their enemies, which is usually performed with a *shout*, as great as that which the treaders of grapes use at the time of vintage."—*Lowth's Commentary*.

Taking into consideration that by such symbolical language the destruction of Israel's enemies was foretold; and taking further into consideration that their restoration also was predicted in language equally symbolical, "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel" (Ezek. xxxvii. 12); is it unnatural, in the face of such precedents, that the coming of the Lord to raise the dead and to judge the world should be described as his "descending from heaven with a shout?" Yet, as in the fulfilment of those judgments and those promises, no voice was heard literally, (the Almighty speaking only by his acts), ought we not to regard the language of the apostle, so closely resembling that of the earlier inspired writers, as symbolic, and to interpret it accordingly?

When the psalmist cried, "O God, to whom

vengeance belongeth, SHOW THYSELF," he did not anticipate any personal appearance of Deity; all that he sought was the manifestation of Divine power on behalf of his people (Ps. xciv. 1).

The next incident connected with the Lord's descent from heaven is, that it will be accompanied with "the voice of the archangel." Scripture is almost silent respecting this order of beings, for only in one other place (the Epistle of St. Jude) is any allusion made to them; and as this is a quotation from an apocryphal book (Jude 9), this Epistle to the Thessalonians contains the only *inspired* reference to an archangel. "The voice of the archangel" is to accompany the Lord's "shout" at his coming. Is this to be understood literally? We have referred to several passages in the Old Testament which represent the Lord as *shouting*, where it is certain that no such vocal performance took place, and that it merely indicated the exercise of almighty power: just as great generals usually accompanied their commands with a *shout*, so the Infinite Spirit is represented to mankind as "roaring from Zion, and uttering his voice from Jerusalem" (Joel iii. 16), and as "shouting like those who tread the grapes" (Jer. xxv. 30). Yet, as these terms are used merely to describe the exercise of almighty power, may we not safely infer that "the voice of the archangel"

on the morning of the resurrection may be introduced figuratively to denote the presence of God and the exercise of his almighty power? As in the prophecy concerning the destruction of Sennacherib, Isaiah says, "The Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard" (Isa. xxx. 30), there was no literal fulfilment of these words, so it may be in reference to the voice of the archangel. The judgment of God on the Assyrians had, indeed, a voice; but this spoke not to the outward ear, but to the inward spirit.

To those who delight in the marvellous, this interpretation may appear tame; but it may nevertheless be scriptural; at all events it is not absurd. One of our most learned and able commentators not only declares his belief that the archangel will utter his voice audibly, but he ventures to tell us the very words which he will probably utter: "Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment!"—(*Dr. A. Clarke.*) The learned doctor does not state in what language the archangel will utter these words. Most likely he assumed that they would be expressed in English. But if so, would they be understood by the Chinese, Hindoos, &c.? Again, if spoken at one point of longitude and latitude, would they be heard at the antipodes? It seems more reasonable, as well as more in accordance with Scripture precedents, to interpret "the voice of the archangel" as we

must interpret the prophecy, "The Lord shall utter his voice ;" that, as lifting up the voice and shouting accompany the exertion of human power, so the exertion of Divine power is *represented* to us as attended with the like outward manifestation, although it is not actually so.

The same remarks are applicable to the third accompaniment of our Lord's descent — "the trumpet of God." As an earthly commander gathers together his dispersed troops by the sound of a trumpet, so God is represented as adopting the same means for gathering together the whole human family. When the Almighty promises to reassemble his scattered people after their dispersion, He is declared to accomplish his purpose by the blowing of a trumpet:—"And it shall come to pass in that day that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come that were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord, in the holy mount at Jerusalem" (Isa. xxvii. 13). No "great trumpet" was actually blown on this occasion ; but God, by his unseen presence and almighty power, accomplished a work which, when attempted by an earthly monarch, is usually preceded by the sound of a trumpet.

A very remarkable passage in the prophecy of Zechariah will confirm the interpretation advo-

cated. The prophet, foretelling the triumph of the Maccabees over the enemies of the Jews, says, "The Lord God shall *blow the trumpet*, and shall go forth with the whirlwinds of the south" (Zech. ix. 14). Taken literally, these words are simply ridiculous; they must, therefore, be taken as an anthropomorphic adaptation of human customs to the Almighty. When the prophet says, "The Lord God shall blow the trumpet," all he means is, that the Lord God shall gather his people together as effectually as the leader of a great army gathers his followers by the sound of a trumpet. This He did by the agency of Cyrus, whose decree enabled Ezra to gather together the exiles in Babylon, and to conduct them to Jerusalem (Ezra i.). And when he says, "The Lord God shall go forth with the whirlwinds of the south," he foretells that the power of the Almighty, irresistible as the whirlwinds of the south, shall sweep away all opposition, however powerful, that may be raised against his people. This He did by strengthening them, under the Maccabean leaders, to triumph over the mighty power of the Syro-Grecian kings. Those who insist on the literal interpretation of prophecy must admit that the same inspired authority warrants his people to look for a personal appearance of the Lord coming "in the whirlwinds of the south, and blowing a trumpet," as

in looking for a personal Saviour “coming in the clouds of heaven.”

The force and propriety of the imagery chosen to represent irresistible power will appear from the description of whirlwinds of the south, as witnessed by Mr. Layard:—“The heat was now almost intolerable. Violent whirlwinds occasionally swept over the country. They could be seen as they advanced from the desert, carrying along with them clouds of sand and dust. Almost utter darkness prevailed during their passage, which lasted generally about an hour, and *nothing could resist their fury*. On returning home one afternoon, after a tempest of this kind, I found no traces of my dwellings; they had been completely carried away.”—(*Layard's Nineveh*, vol. i. p. 124.) No imagery could more strikingly describe the irresistible power of the Almighty. Isaiah adopts it in foretelling the destruction of Babylon:—

“As whirlwinds in the south pass through ;
So it cometh from the desert, from the terrible land”
(Isa. xxi. 1).

It remains for us to inquire what is meant by the saints “who are alive and remain being caught up together with them” (*i.e.* with those already raised from the dead) “in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.”

Some understand these words literally ; others interpret them figuratively. What the definite notions of the former class of interpreters are, if they have any such, it is impossible to specify. Do they imagine that all the millions who have, since the time of Adam, died in faith, being raised from the dead, and suspended in the air, will be joined by all the millions of believers on earth at the time of the Lord's coming ? and that their first meeting with the Lord himself and the whole family of the redeemed will be, not in the mansions which He has prepared for them, but in some elevated point of this world's atmosphere ?

We think that a more natural and a more scriptural explanation may be given of these words, although they must be admitted to rank amongst the "some things hard to be understood" in Paul's Epistles.

The apostle, like the prophets, in foretelling future events, adopts the language of symbols. We have stated some reasons why the antecedent portions of this prophecy—such as the descent from heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God—are all to be interpreted, in accordance with Scripture precedents, as symbolic expressions. May not the meeting of the Lord *in the air* be likewise symbolic, the whole imagery pointing to the one literal result, "So shall we ever be with the

Lord?" What light can we gain on this subject by searching the earliest Jewish records?

In the first chapter of Genesis we read that God, on the second day of creation, "made the firmament, and divided the waters that were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament" (the atmosphere thus occupying the intermediate space): "and God called the firmament *heaven*" (ver. 6—8). May not this record have led the Hebrew people to choose the *air* as the symbol of the heavenly world? They believed that there were three heavens: the first was the region of the air, where the birds fly, which are therefore called "the fowls of heaven;" the second heaven they regarded as that part of space in which the heavenly bodies are placed; and the third as the abode of holy angels, and "the spirits of just men made perfect," where the presence of God is especially manifested. It was into the third heaven that St. Paul was caught up (2 Cor. xii. 2).

The author of the Second Book of Esdras uses these remarkable words: "Upon the second day, thou madest the *spirit of the firmament*" (vi. 41).

Calmet, in his "Dictionary of the Bible," says, "Heaven is often taken for the air; 'birds of heaven,' *i.e.* which fly in the air; 'waters of heaven,' *i.e.* rains from the atmosphere. God caused fire and brimstone to rain from heaven on

Sodom; that is, to fall down from the air (Gen. xix. 24). The dew of heaven; the manna from heaven; the clouds of heaven; in all these, and similar phrases, heaven is put for the air." Amongst the Jews these terms appear to be almost synonymous.

The Essenes, an eminent Jewish sect, believed that the soul emanated out of the noblest and purest air; and that when released from its corporeal bonds, it soars back rejoicing to its native element.—*Milman's History of the Jews*, vol. ii. p. 113.

The atmosphere bears in some respects much the same relationship to the material earth that the soul of man does to his body. It is unseen, subtle, intangible. It is, therefore, a fit emblem of the spiritual world. The Jews regarded the atmosphere as the region in which spirits dwelt; and we find the apostle speaking of Satan as "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. ii. 2); *i.e.* the prince over the evil spirits supposed to exercise power in the air. When man was created, God "*breathed* into his nostrils the *breath* of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen. ii. 7), his body having been previously formed of the dust of the ground. When Ezekiel in vision prophesied, "Thus saith the Lord, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live" (thus invoking the life-

giving Spirit), the lifeless multitude became animated by a living spirit, and “stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army” (Ezek. xxxvii. 9, 10). When the Holy Spirit descended, on the day of Pentecost, to impart spiritual life to men dead in trespasses and sins, his presence was indicated by the symbol of “a rushing mighty wind that filled all the house,” &c. (Acts ii. 2).

We infer, therefore, that the air simply is the emblem of the spiritual world; breathed from one living being into another, it becomes the emblem of spiritual life; as a rushing mighty wind it denotes the exertion of extraordinary spiritual power. The meeting of the Lord in the air may be a symbolic expression equivalent to our entrance into the world of spirits, or that “kingdom of God” which “flesh and blood cannot inherit.”

The events foretold by the apostle are these:—

1st. That the bodies of those who sleep in Jesus shall be raised to life by his glorious power. This exertion of Divine power, in accordance with Scripture precedent, is described as “the coming of the Lord.”

2nd. That when He shall thus manifest his almighty power, those who are alive and remain on earth will not take precedence of those who have died in faith; for these shall first be raised from their graves, whilst the living shall,

as the apostle elsewhere teaches, "be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet;" and that then those raised from the dead, and those who have never tasted death, shall be gathered together unto Him, both alike having put off all that is corruptible, and having put on incorruption; they shall see Him as He is, and be like Him; "and so shall they ever be with the Lord." The comfort proffered by the apostle must be derived from the realisation of these great facts: the shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God, whether interpreted literally or symbolically, are mere accessories. They are the frame, not the picture.

One more expression in this passage requires examination; it is, "Then *WE* which are alive and remain," &c. Many have inferred from these words that the apostle expected the coming of the Lord "to judge the quick and the dead at his appearing" during his own lifetime, and that he led the Thessalonian Church to expect the same. Others object to this statement, mainly because they regard it as inconsistent with the inspired character of St. Paul. The teaching of Scripture appears to be that, although the apostles were commissioned to proclaim the "coming of the Lord" in various manifestations of Divine power, they were not

commissioned to proclaim "the times or the seasons" in which the Lord would come. There is strong reason to believe that they did not know these; for when the eleven apostles asked their Master, after his resurrection, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power" (or, as Boothroyd translates it, "his own disposal"). Even our Lord himself, on one occasion, declared, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven; neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark xiii. 32). Not that we are to infer from these words that the knowledge of Him who "dwelt in the bosom of the Father" was limited. These expressions are to be understood in the same sense as that of St. Paul, where he says, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. ii. 2). So, when our Lord declared that the day and the hour of his own coming were not *known* by Him, He merely meant that it was no part of his mission to make the time of his coming known. The apostles were inspired to teach certain truths; but such inspiration did not make them infallible, otherwise St. Paul would not have been justified when he "withstood St. Peter to his face, because he was to be blamed"

(Gal. ii. 11). "The times and seasons" are amongst "the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God;" they formed no part of our Lord's teaching, and the apostles were ignorant respecting them; but the fact of the Son of man coming to judge the world in righteousness is amongst "the things which are revealed, and belong to us and our children for ever" (Deut. xxix. 29).

Great instruction may be derived from observing the practical influence exerted over the Church at Thessalonica by their false notions respecting the coming of the Lord—an event to which they looked forward with daily expectation. It is clear, from statements made in the Second Epistle, that some of them became disorderly, idle, and busybodies; and this to so serious an extent that the apostle felt bound to command those who remained consistent, "in the name of the Lord Jesus, to withdraw themselves from every brother who thus walked disorderly" (2 Thess. iii. 7). We learn also, from the same Epistle, that their daily expectation of the coming of the Lord did not tend to strengthen their faith, or to promote their Christian comfort; for the apostle exhorts them "not to be soon shaken in mind, nor yet be troubled," by imagining that the day of the Lord is at hand (ii. 2). Had there been no special cause for this exhortation,

St. Paul would not have given it. To what, then, are we to attribute this declension in the Thessalonian Church, arising as it did from erroneous expectations respecting the coming of the Lord? Probably because these, like many modern Christians, were looking for a Saviour in the clouds, instead of looking for Him in their heart. Had they fixed their minds upon the Master's declaration, "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John xiv. 23), they would have enjoyed a real coming of the Lord, instead of being deluded by one which was imaginary. The cultivation of that obedient love essential to the securing of the promise would have made them consistent instead of disorderly, zealous instead of idle, and devoted to their Master's work instead of being "busybodies;" they would have been established instead of being shaken in mind, and comforted instead of being troubled. *This* is the "coming of the Lord" which every Christian should endeavour every day to realise, and should prepare his heart accordingly. If we secure this coming, we shall be prepared for every other; and "though the earth be removed, and the mountains be cast into the depths of the sea" (Ps. xlv. 2), we shall not fear, knowing that the Lord of hosts

is with us, and that the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

The first coming of the Messiah had been foretold in language highly figurative. Thus Isa. xl. 3—5 :—

“ A voice crieth in the wilderness,
Prepare ye the way of Jehovah !
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God !
Every valley shall be exalted,
And every mountain and hill brought low ;
And the crooked shall be made straight,
And the rough places a smooth plain ;
And the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see the salvation of our God ”
(Boothroyd's version).

How was this prophecy of our Lord's first coming fulfilled? Not by the appearance to the men of that generation of some thousands of pioneers with their shovels and pickaxes, to level the hills of Judea, and to fill up the valleys, so that the King “ coming in the name of Jehovah ” might travel, like an oriental monarch, in a way cast up and prepared. This great prophecy had its fulfilment when John the Baptist—the forerunner of the Lord—preached in the wilderness, calling upon all the people to “ repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand ; ” and to “ bring forth fruits meet for repentance ; ” also by pointing his disciples to “ the Lamb of God, which taketh

away the sin of the world," and directing them to Him who alone could impart that baptism which the baptism by water did but prefigure: "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost" (Mark i. 3—8). It was by thus preaching the fundamental truths of the Gospel—the necessity of "repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus," in order to our being "born of the Spirit"—that the way of Messiah was prepared. The impediments to be removed were not material mountains, nor were the parts to be raised existing valleys. The hindrances were of a spiritual nature—the pride of men, however lofty, must be brought down; before the true Zerubabel the "great mountain must become a plain" (Zech. iv. 7). The valleys must be exalted; the thoughts, the affections, the desires of men sunk low in sensuality and grovelling in the dust must be raised up. Thus the way of the Lord is prepared by preaching to men repentance, faith, and the necessity of their being "born of the Spirit."

If the prophecies respecting Messiah's first coming cannot be interpreted literally, on what principle can those relating to his second coming be so interpreted? Those who look for the Lord "coming in the clouds of heaven" literally, would probably, had they been living at the time of his first coming, have looked for ten thousand

navvies to level the mountains of Judea, and to fill up the valleys. The preaching of repentance by John the Baptist would be considered inadequate to the grandeur of Isaiah's prophecy. Yet it is unquestionably the actual fulfilment of it. Christ, the King anointed by God, coming to bear witness to the truth of God, revolutionises the moral world ; He exalts the humble ; He casts down the proud ; " He creates all things new."



CHAPTER IV.

SYMBOLS.

“Figurative language is as plain as literal language, provided the symbols of which it is composed be accurately and definitely understood ; and for the right understanding of them, Scripture itself furnishes a key.”—DR. G. S. FABER.

SECTION I.—SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE.

SYMBOLIC language may be defined as the use of words which represent material objects, to set forth, as by a pictorial representation, abstract things or future events. To effect this, some points of resemblance between the symbol and the thing symbolized are essential.

In Scripture symbols are used chiefly for three purposes :—

1st. To represent spiritual truths ; as when our Lord says, “ I am the door ; ” “ I am the vine ; ” and again, “ I am the light of the world.”

2nd. To commemorate past events. So the bread, in the Lord's Supper, is the symbol or representation of his body broken for us ; and the wine is the symbol of his blood shed for the remission of our sins.

3rd. To prefigure future events ; as when the prophet foretells the destruction of kingdoms hostile to God's Church :—

“ And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved,
And the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll ;
And all the host shall fall down,
As the leaf falleth from the vine,
And as a falling fig from the fig-tree ” (Isa. xxxiv. 4).

No part of Holy Scripture is so much misinterpreted as the writings of the prophets. This arises from the fact that the events foretold are expressed in symbolic language ; consequently, unless these symbols be understood, we can no more interpret prophecy than one ignorant of the alphabet can read an ordinary book.

To interpret symbolic language literally makes the holy Word of God appear ridiculous. For instance, we read—

“ In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor
that is hired,
By them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria,
The head, and the hair of the feet ;
And it shall consume the beard ” (Isa. vii. 20).

“These figurative expressions,” says Bishop Lowth, “denote the utter devastation of the country, from one end to the other, and the plundering of the people, from the highest to the lowest, by the Assyrians. . . . The hairs of the head are the highest orders of the State; those of the feet are the common people; the beard is the king, the high priest, the very supreme in dignity and majesty.” Thus interpreted, the imagery is striking and impressive; literally interpreted, it would be most profane.

Take another example. By the mouth of Isaiah, God says to Sennacherib—

“Because thy rage against me,
And thine insolence, have reached mine ear,
Therefore will I put my hook in thy nose,
And my bridle in thy jaws,
And turn thee back by the way thou camest” .
(Isa. xxxvii. 29).

In this figurative language the utter helplessness of the proud monarch in the hands of the Almighty is very strikingly depicted. God’s word of threatening was fulfilled when “the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand men” (ver. 36).

A literal interpretation of these figurative terms would be blasphemous.

The remarks of the Rev. Hartwell Horne on symbolic language are valuable. He says, "Much light will be thrown on the symbolical language of Scripture by a careful collation of the writings of the prophets with each other; for the symbolical language of the prophets is almost a science in itself. None can fully comprehend the depth, sublimity, and force of their writings, who are not thoroughly acquainted with the peculiar and appropriate imagery they were accustomed to use. This is the main key to many of the prophecies; and without knowing how to apply it, the interpreter will often in vain essay to discover their hidden treasures. Lastly, the diligent comparison of the New Testament with the Old will essentially contribute to illustrate the symbolical phraseology of the prophets."—*Horne's Introduction*, vol. ii. p. 462.

The reason why symbolic language is chosen for prophetic revelation is well expressed by the Rev. Robert Hall in a discourse entitled "The Glory of God in concealing." He says, "The prophetic part of the Word of God, while it contains some general intimation of future events, is expressed in language, or denoted by imagery, proverbially obscure. This is intended to afford some general knowledge of the future, or it would not be prophecy; but, at the same time, obscurity forms a necessary ingredient. Were it free

from that—were it like the language of narrative—it would give such a distinct knowledge of the future event as would lead some persons to use means for the purpose of accomplishing it by their own power, and tempt others presumptuously to endeavour to frustrate it. The design of prophecy is not to enable persons to anticipate the minute circumstances of events; but partly to excite in their minds a general expectation, by presenting a vague and shadowy outline; partly to afford a striking illustration of the power and providence of God, in bringing to pass those events on the arrival of a distant age. The infinite wisdom of God appears in his foretelling future events in such a manner, that when they arrive they tally and correspond to the prophecy in a great variety of particulars; while, in the meantime, the events are so darkly shadowed, that the human agents by whom they are accomplished are ignorant that, in so doing, they are, in fact, fulfilling the counsels of Heaven. They merely follow the dictates of their own minds, act agreeably to their own inclinations, and have no intention of bringing to pass those events to which the prophecy has reference. Nebuchadnezzar little supposed that he was a mere rod in the hand of Deity to chastise his own people. Cyrus, when he set out for Babylon to deliver them, little supposed that the hand of God had

girded him, and prepared his way before him. Both were unconscious agents in accomplishing the purposes of that Divine Providence whose wisdom enlightened their path, and whose energy sustained them. God had foretold by his prophets the rejection of Jesus Christ by the Jewish nation, and his crucifixion; yet Pilate and Herod, in condemning and executing Him, acted as freely, and were therefore as much accountable, as if He had not been 'by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God delivered up' (Acts ii. 23). The treason that was practised by Judas on his Lord and Master had been announced by the psalmist; yet how much is the wisdom of God magnified in permitting this to remain so secret, that the very perpetrator was probably ignorant of it, acting with the same freedom and spontaneity, with as close an adherence to the dictates of his own heart, the peculiarities of his own character, as if no such prophecy had been recorded! Thus God secures the glory of his own foreknowledge, at the same time that He leaves undisturbed the sphere of human agency."—*Robert Hall's Works*, vol. vi. p. 57.

To secure that partial obscurity which is "an essential ingredient" in prophecy, the all-wise God has chosen to reveal future events in language highly symbolical. Yet this language of

symbols, though in some respects mysterious, has no vague or variable sense, but one which is uniform and definite in its application. This peculiar characteristic of Scripture symbols is well described by Dr. John Smith. He says, "Though the prophets, partly from necessity and partly from choice, are profuse in the use of metaphors, they do not appear, like other writers, to have the liberty of using them as every one's fancy directed. The same set of images, however diversified in the manner of applying them, is always used, both in allegory and metaphor, to denote the same subjects to which they are in a manner appropriated."—(*Summary View of the Prophets.*) This peculiarity of Scripture symbols being kept in view will greatly assist the student of prophecy. He must remember that the application of certain figures to certain objects and events is uniform in the sacred volume.

In this respect, the symbolic language of prophecy closely resembles the language of hieroglyphics. Bishop Warburton writes, "The reciprocal influence hieroglyphic writing would have on language is evident. The old Asiatic style, so highly figurative, seems likewise, by what we find of its remains in the prophetic language of the sacred writers, to have been evidently fashioned to the mode of ancient hiero-

glyphics, both *curiologic* and *tropical*.* Of the first kind are the figurative expressions of *spotted garments* to denote iniquity ; an *intoxicating draught*, to signify error and misery ; the *sword* and *bow*, a warrior ; a *gigantic stature*, a mighty leader ; *balance, weights, and measures*, a judge or magistrate ; *arms*, a powerful nation like the Roman. Of the second kind, which answers to the *tropical* hieroglyphic, is the calling of empires, kings, and nobles by the names of the heavenly luminaries, the sun, moon, and stars ; their temporary disasters, or entire overthrow, denoted by *eclipses* and *extinctions* ; the destruction of the nobility by *stars falling from the firmament* ; hostile invasions by *thunder and tempestuous winds* ; and leaders of armies, conquerors, and founders of empire by *lions, bears, leopards, and goats, or high trees*. In a word, the prophetic style seems to be a SPEAKING HIEROGLYPHIC."

The Bishop adds, "These observations will not only assist us in the intelligence of the Old and New Testaments, but likewise vindicate their character from the illiterate cavils of modern libertines, who have foolishly mistaken that colouring for the peculiar workmanship of

* The term *curiologic* defines those hieroglyphics which are pictorial ; the term *tropical* those which are figurative or emblematical.

the speaker's heated imagination which was the sober, established language of their times ; a language which God and his Son condescended to employ as the properest vehicle of the high mysterious ways of providence, in the revelation of themselves to mankind."—*Warburton's Works*, vol. iv. p. 175.

In harmony with these views of Bishop Warburton, Dr. John Smith writes, "The prophets borrow some of their images from ancient hieroglyphics, which they take in their usual acceptance, thus : a star was the emblem of a god or hero ; a horn, the emblem of great power or strength ; a rod (or sceptre), the emblem of royalty ; and they signify the same in the prophets."

The author of "The Seventh Vial," in the chapter on Apocalyptic Symbols, writes, "As an example of the way in which an alphabet of the Apocalypse might be made out, we may instance a few of its more prominent symbols. Earth symbolizes society in a settled state ; sea, society in a state of convulsion ; rivers, nations ; a flood, nations in motion ; mountains and islands, great and small kingdoms ; air, the political atmosphere ; heaven, the civil or ecclesiastical firmament ; sun, the monarch ; stars, inferior rulers ; hail and thunder, wars ; earthquake, revolution ; head, form of government ; horn,

king or kingdom; bow, war; crown, victory; altar, martyrdom; coals, severe judgments; vine, a church; wilderness, a state of affliction; rainbow, a covenant; key, ecclesiastical authority; angel, a minister of God's purposes." And he lays down two important rules of interpretation to be most rigidly observed: "1st. We must always treat symbols as such. We must not regard them as figures in one place, and literal descriptions in another. . . . 2nd. We must always give the same interpretation to the same symbol. Just as we attribute the same power to the same alphabetic character, and just as we attach one meaning to the same hieroglyphic wherever we find it on the Egyptian monuments, so we must preserve uniformity in our interpretations of Apocalyptic symbols."—(*Seventh Vial*, pp. 7, 13.) What applies to the Apocalypse applies equally to all the prophetic figures.

SECTION II.—SYMBOLIC ACTIONS.

Symbolic actions, as well as symbolic language, are frequent in the inspired volume. The "more excellent sacrifice" offered by Abel was a symbol or prefigurement of the acceptable sacrifice of Christ. The preternatural birth of Isaac foreshadowed the preternatural birth of the promised Seed, who was to "bruise the serpent's

head." The contemplated sacrifice of Abraham's "only son, whom he loved," prefigured still more vividly, and in a greater variety of analogies, the death of Him who is the only, the well-beloved Son of the Father. The return of Isaac, at the expiration of three days, to his father's home, symbolized the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; for this is intimated by the apostle, who, when commending the faith of Abraham for "accounting that God was able to raise up Isaac even from the dead," adds, "From whence also he received him in a figure" (Heb. xi. 19).

In an age when printing was unknown, and written documents were rare, symbolic actions, embodying great truths and important duties, furnished the best, the most impressive, and the most permanent mode of instruction. We are taught verbally that prayer is a duty; but how strikingly is the duty enforced, and how great the encouragement afforded, by the record of Jacob in his distress, wrestling with the angel, and answering the request, "Let me go, for the day breaketh," by the determined resolve, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. xxxii. 26). The record concerning Moses, how, during the fight between Israel and Amalek, whilst he held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and how, when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed; how, when "Moses' hands were

heavy, Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side, so that his hands were steady until the going down of the sun;" and how, in consequence, "Joshua discomfited Amalek with the edge of the sword" (Exod. xvii. 8—16), is a symbolic action, one of national interest, easily remembered, and calculated to encourage God's people in every season of danger and difficulty. These graphic records of incidents in the lives of Jacob and of Moses live in the Church to this day; and although sceptics may sneer at them, those who are accustomed to "call upon God in their distress" derive from these speaking narratives unspeakable encouragement.

Symbolic actions, by the express command of God, were frequently performed by the prophets. This mode of teaching had many advantages. It was a lively representation, which, by appealing to the eyes of the spectators, fixed their attention and prompted the earnest question, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?" (Ezek. xxiv. 19.) It is evident that God designed these expressive actions in order to provoke inquiry and arouse the attention of men sunk in supineness and indifference; for when, by Divine direction, Ezekiel, in order to point out the approaching fate of Jerusalem, had dug through the walls of his house,

and carried forth his goods by twilight in the sight of the people, the word of the Lord came to him in the morning, saying, "Son of man, hath not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said unto thee, What doest thou?" (Ezek. xii. 1—17.) No words could of themselves have been so impressive as the action by which Jeremiah accompanied his denunciation when, in the presence of the ancients of the people and the ancients of the priests, having, by the word of the Lord, declared to them their sins and their consequent impending destruction, he dashed to the ground the potter's earthen bottle which he had held in his hand whilst speaking, and said, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again" (Jer. xix.). They saw, in the shivered pieces, the emblem of their own utter destruction.

Our Saviour himself adopted this method of teaching by action; for when the disciples, prompted by pride and ambition, asked Him, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 1, 2); and

then He added, "Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Still more touching and impressive was that singular act of the Lord Jesus, when at the last supper with his beloved disciples, and knowing that his hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, and being anxious, by his own example, indelibly to inscribe on their hearts his great law of humility and love, He arose from the supper table, laid aside his garments, and took a towel and girded himself; then poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. And having completed this work (usually performed by slaves), He sat down again, and said, "Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master, and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John xiii.) Can anything be imagined more impressive?

Symbolism pervaded the whole of the Mosaic dispensation; it was, indeed, its most prominent characteristic. By no other means, probably, could spiritual truths have been conveyed to an

uneducated people, degraded by oppression and slavery. As our earliest ideas are obtained from contact with material objects, and we are led on thence to the knowledge of what is intellectual, moral, and spiritual, so God wisely adapted the earliest revelation of himself and of his will to the limited capacities of those whom He desired to instruct. The like process of beginning with what is material, and proceeding to that which is spiritual, may be traced in nature and in grace. Next to the fundamental truth of the unity of God, one of the most important truths for men to know and to feel is the evil of sin. How was this knowledge to be conveyed to the mind of an ignorant, selfish, and degraded people? Only by making bodily pollution, contracted, for example, by touching a leper or the body of a dead man, the type or symbol of spiritual pollution. The frequent washings enjoined on the outwardly unclean, in order to "the purifying of the flesh," symbolized that baptism of the Holy Ghost by which alone the pollution of the soul can be washed away. The daily sacrifice of an innocent victim as an atonement for sin not only reminded the Israelite of the great truth, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," but also prefigured "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter i. 19). The apostle Paul shows forcibly the figurative

character of the Mosaic ritual, when, writing to the Hebrews, he says, "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the *purifying of the flesh*: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot unto God, *purge your conscience* from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. ix. 13, 14.) Bishop Lowth justly says, "The whole system of the Hebrew rites is one great and complicated allegory."—*Lectures*, vol. i. p. 170.

Just as we find it expedient to use pictorial representations to assist our children in learning to read, so the God and Father of all wisely and kindly adopted symbolic teaching to lead men, by the medium of external objects, to the knowledge of things spiritual and unseen. The great majority of the Jewish people rested in the outward forms and ceremonies, and could not see to the end of that which is abolished" (2 Cor. iii. 13). But he who was a Jew inwardly, discerned the spiritual meaning of these symbols. Thus we find Hezekiah praying for those who had not cleansed themselves (externally), yet did eat the Passover: "The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary"

(2 Chron. xxx. 20). And it is added, "The Lord hearkened to Hezekiah." Moses pointed out the spiritual meaning of circumcision when he said, "The Lord thy God shall circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live" (Deut. xxx. 6). David also expressed his intelligent appreciation of Mosaic ordinances when he said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. li. 17).

The symbols, the types, and the ceremonies of the Jewish Church were adapted to the capacity of those to whom they were given. They resemble the pictorial illustrations and the bodily exercises used in our infant schools. So the apostle teaches, "The law was our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." And he adds, "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Gal. iii. 24, 25). "The darkness is past, the true light now shineth," and all Christians are exhorted to "walk in the light" of the Sun of righteousness. Those who, in modern days, would lead us back to a religion of forms, and shadows, and ceremonies, act as absurdly as the professors in our universities would, were they to introduce into the several colleges the pictures

and apparatus used in infant schools; or as the general of an army who would feed his much-enduring troops on milk or pap, instead of "strong meat."

A very able writer has said, "The law of Moses is the Gospel of the Messiah in hieroglyphic or figure, so exactly, so distinctly, does it represent the person, the offices, and the actions of the Messiah—the grace, blessings, and happiness of the Christian Church."—(*Lowman's Hebrew Ritual*, p. 58.) To this mode of teaching the words of the apostle are applicable, "Howbeit that was not first which was spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (1 Cor. xv. 46).

SECTION III.—SYMBOLIC PREDICTIONS.

By symbolic predictions we mean prophecies expressed in symbolic language. Two or three illustrations will serve to throw light on all similar predictions. We will commence with one of the most remarkable.

I.

"*The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.*"—ACTS ii. 20.

These ominous words formed part of St. Peter's address to the multitudes gathered together in

Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost. The events of that day rendered it one of the most important in the history of mankind. To the Jewish mind Pentecost appeared in a twofold aspect. It was a great national festival, on which thanksgivings were offered to God for the harvest, and the first-fruits were presented before Him. It was also a commemoration of that great event in Hebrew history—the giving of the law from Mount Sinai. The signification of both these typical observances was manifested on “the day of Pentecost.”

The festival was observed fifty days after the Passover (Lev. xxiii. 16). The first-fruits were then brought into the Temple, and presented before the Lord. It was fifty days after the crucifixion that the first-fruits of our Saviour’s death and resurrection were displayed to the Church and to the world. He who “by wicked hands had been crucified and slain” was now “by the right hand of God exalted;” and having “received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost,” had given proof of his exaltation by shedding forth that which they now saw and heard (Acts ii. 33). “The Spirit of God,” who, on the morning of creation, “moved upon the face of the waters,” now came at the dawn of the new creation as “a rushing mighty wind,” whilst “cloven tongues, like as of fire, sat upon each of the apostles” (Acts ii.). Under the influence of this Divine

inspiration they preached "Christ crucified," and the result was that in one day three thousand souls were converted. These were "the first-fruits" of his sufferings and death; and thus the promise received a partial fulfilment, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. liii. 11).

Equally significant was the fulfilment of what the Pentecostal feast commemorated, viz. the giving of the law from Mount Sinai. The two tables of stone, though "graven by the finger of God," were broken literally (through the righteous indignation of Moses) before they reached the people—an act, on the part of the prophet, significant of what their history would be. But on the great day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was shed forth abundantly, his mission was to write the laws of God, not on tables of stone, but on fleshy tables of the heart (2 Cor. iii.). The law, "written and engraven on stones, was the ministration of death" (2 Cor. iii.). But the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of truth, and of love, and of holiness, was sent down; and thus the promised blessings of the new covenant received a partial fulfilment, "I will put my laws in their inward parts, and write them in their hearts" (Jer. xxxi. 33). "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

It was on this memorable occasion, when the

twofold signification of this typical feast was so remarkably illustrated—when, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the New Creation was initiated, and the “first-fruits” of it presented to the Lord of all—that St. Peter uttered the enigmatical and mysterious words we are about to consider.

In Scripture great changes in the ecclesiastical and in the political world are prefigured by great changes in the material creation—the heavens and the earth. In all ages and in all countries, eclipses and comets, earthquakes and devastating storms, have been regarded as fearful omens.

Our first inquiry must be directed to ascertain the time of which the apostle speaks: “That great and notable day of the Lord.” Some have imagined that he refers to the day of final judgment; but this is disproved by the context, for he speaks of a prophecy which was at the time actually in the course of fulfilment. Referring to the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, he says, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, And it shall come to pass, in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,” &c. (Acts ii. 17). By “the last days,” in the language of the New Testament, is generally meant the end of the Mosaic economy, which was now “ready to vanish away.” In this sense, the apostle Paul, writing to the Hebrews, says, “God hath in these *last*

days spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. i. 2). And the apostle John speaks to the same effect: "Little children, it is the last time: even now are there many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John ii. 18); *i.e.* the last time of the Jewish Church and State.

Further, that the day of final judgment is not designated by the words, "that great and notable day of the Lord," is clear from what is added: "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved;" and from that clause in the original prophecy of Joel, "For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call" (Joel ii. 32). Prayer will be of no avail in the day of judgment; but it would, as St. Peter intimates, secure salvation "in that great and notable day of the Lord."

"The day of the Lord" is a phrase of frequent occurrence in Scripture. It is almost invariably used to denote some great and special judgment of the Almighty. Thus, when Isaiah foretells the destruction of Babylon, he says, "Howl ye; for *the day of the Lord* is at hand" (Isa. xiii. 6). The prophet Joel, speaking of the approaching calamities of Israel, says, "Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come"

(Joel i. 15). Predicting the destruction of Pharaoh's army at the Euphrates, Jeremiah says, "For this is the day of the Lord of hosts, that He may avenge himself of his adversaries" (Jer. xlv. 10). The prophet Amos, referring to the destruction of Samaria, says, "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light" (Amos v. 18). The prophet Joel, predicting the first destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, says, "The day of the Lord cometh; it is nigh at hand" (Joel ii. 1). And Zechariah, foretelling the second destruction by the Romans, says, "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee" (Zech. xiv. 1).

Having ascertained that this phrase, "the day of the Lord," ordinarily refers to special judgments brought by God on guilty nations, it will not be difficult to attach a definite meaning to the words used by the apostle, "That *great and notable* day of the Lord." The prophet Joel speaks of it as the *great and terrible* day of the Lord; and Malachi, referring evidently to the destruction of Jerusalem, says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet"—*i.e.* John the Baptist (see Matt. xvii. 10)—"before the coming of the *great and dreadful* day of the Lord" (Mal. iv. 4). If, by "the day of the Lord" simply, a day of

severe judgment is designated, that judgment must be greatly intensified which is described as the great and *terrible*, or the great and *dreadful*, or the great and *notable* day of the Lord. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians is foretold by Isaiah simply as "the day of the Lord" (Isa. ii. 12); but the destruction effected by the Romans is the great and terrible, or the great and dreadful, day of the Lord. For although Jerusalem and the Temple were burnt by Nebuchadnezzar, and the people carried captive to Babylon, yet, after the lapse of seventy years, the captives returned, rebuilt the city and the Temple, and the worship of the one living and true God was re-established. Concerning the first desolation in "the day of the Lord," Daniel declares that "under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem" (Dan. ix. 12). But concerning the second desolation, effected by the Roman armies on "that great and dreadful day of the Lord," our Saviour himself declares that "then" (*i.e.* when "the end shall come," indicated by the approach of the Roman armies) "shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. xxiv. 21). Those who have read Josephus's History of the Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem well know with what terrible precision this prophecy

of our Lord was fulfilled. The preaching of the everlasting Gospel on the day of Pentecost, and the preliminary fulfilment of the promise, "It shall come to pass that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh," preceded by nearly forty years "this great and terrible day of the Lord."

We must next inquire what is meant by "the sun being turned into darkness, and the moon into blood." No literal fulfilment of these foretold prodigies has ever occurred; nor is there the slightest reason to believe that any such marvellous changes will ever take place. The infinitely wise God seeks to promote the moral and spiritual welfare of mankind, not by physical convulsions, but by moral and spiritual influences. Elijah did not recognise the presence of God when, as "the Lord passed by, a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord;" nor in the earthquake, nor in the consuming fire; but, when he heard "the still, small voice," his soul was filled with awe, and he wrapped his face in his mantle (as the seraphim cover their faces with their wings), and stood at the entering in of the cave, in the attitude of worship, ready to listen to the commands of the Almighty (1 Kings xix. 11). Then the language of his heart was, "I will hear what God the Lord will say."

References in Scripture to the sun, moon,

and stars are very frequent. Sometimes they are spoken of simply as material objects, the work of the Creator: thus the psalmist says, "The sun ariseth," &c.; and again, "The sun knoweth his going down" (Ps. civ. 19). Again, they are used figuratively, as when he says, "The Lord God is a sun," &c. And, lastly, they are used symbolically. It is thus they are used in the text we are considering, and in all kindred texts, whether expressed in prophetic or in apostolic language. The meaning of the symbols employed must be ascertained before we can determine the meaning of the text and context.

In Scripture the sun, moon, and stars, which are the highest objects in the material universe, are chosen figuratively to represent kings, queens, princes, or rulers, these being the highest earthly authorities. The choice of the heavenly bodies as symbols of ruling powers may, like most other peculiarities in Hebrew literature, be traced to its earliest records. In the Mosaic account of the creation we read, "And God made two great lights; the greater light to RULE the day, and the lesser light to RULE the night: He made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of heaven, to give light upon the earth, and to RULE over the day and over the night" (Gen. i. 16, 18). The psalmist also records how God

“made the sun to RULE by day, and the moon and stars to RULE by night” (Ps. cxxxvi. 8, 9).

The dream of Joseph, in which he beheld “the sun and moon and the eleven stars making obeisance to him” (Gen. xxxvii. 7), formed another precedent for the use of this symbolic language.

One or two quotations from the Old Testament will confirm what has been stated respecting this language of Scripture symbols. When the prophet Isaiah foretells the destruction of Babylon by the Medes and Persians, he says, “For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine” (Isa. xiii. 10). When Ezekiel predicts the destruction of Egypt, he represents God as saying, “And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light” (Ezek. xxxii. 7). The “darkening of the sun the turning of the moon into blood, and the falling of the stars, are,” as Sir Isaac Newton observes, “significant of the ceasing of a kingdom.”

When, on the contrary, God foretells the restoration of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, and the re-establishment of their civil

and ecclesiastical polity, He says, "I have put my words in thy mouth, and covered thee in the shadow of my hand, that I may PLANT THE HEAVENS, and LAY THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people" (Isa. li. 16). The restoration of their divinely appointed religious polity is indicated by God's "planting the heavens," and that of their civil constitution by his "laying the foundations of the earth."

Viewing, therefore, these words of the apostle in the light shed on them by the language of the prophets, we may discern their real signification: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come." Divested of all that is figurative or symbolical, they simply foretell that the Jewish ecclesiastical and political constitution shall be subverted, never to be restored. This subversion was commenced when Judea became a Roman province: it was completed in the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, and the burning of the Temple, since which notable events the descendants of Israel have ceased to be a nation, and their religious system, although of Divine origin, has been abolished; thus fulfilling the remarkable prophecy of Hosea, "The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a sacrifice, and without an

image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim" (iii. 4). Notwithstanding the desolation of the Holy Land, and the destruction of their civil and religious constitution, the seed of Abraham carefully shun all idol worship. They continue "without teraphim" as well as "without sacrifice."

The propriety of the apostle's address announcing the approaching destruction of the Jewish heavens and earth, in order that the new heavens and the new earth might occupy their place, may be easily discerned. Having been endued with power from on high by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he began on this the day of Pentecost to preach the Gospel; that is, to proclaim the actual commencement of "the kingdom of heaven upon earth," that kingdom which, prior to the death and resurrection of the Lord, had been proclaimed by John the Baptist and the apostles only as *at hand*. This preaching of St. Peter on the day of Pentecost was the first occasion on which he used "the keys of the kingdom of heaven;" the door of faith was opened to the Jews. His preaching the same Gospel subsequently to Cornelius and his friends was another exercise of the same delegated power: he opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. The Gospel thus preached to every creature, whilst it was the rock on which the

Church was built, sounded the funeral knell of the Mosaic economy; and as the ecclesiastical and the political systems were so thoroughly interwoven, it was necessary, perhaps, that both should be abolished together. The apostle declares to the assembled multitude the grand, distinctive truth of the Gospel, now for the first time fully proclaimed, that men are to be saved, not by any ceremonial observances, but through faith in Him whom they, "by wicked hands, had crucified and slain," but whom "God had raised up;" and who, he adds, "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear" (Acts ii.). This was the truth which was to regenerate the world; that world which, by the lies of Satan, had been destroyed. As man fell by believing Satan's falsehood, so he is restored by believing in Him who "came into the world that He might bear witness unto the truth" (John xviii. 37).

A very striking resemblance may be traced between the apostle Peter's address to the Jews on the day of Pentecost and the appeal of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews. The latter refers the Hebrew Church to the words of God spoken by Haggai the prophet: "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven"

(Heb. xii. 26). As St. Peter exhorted the Jews to *receive* the Gospel, so the apostle Paul exhorts them to *continue* in it, and not to “turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven.” Both apostles urge the same consideration—the approaching end of the Jewish dispensation. Dr. Adam Clarke thus comments on the words of St. Paul:—“Probably referring to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and the total abolition of the political and ecclesiastical constitution of the Jews; the one being signified by the *earth*, the other by *heaven*; for the Jewish State and worship are often thus termed in the prophetic writings.”—(*Commentary on Hebrews*.) The words of the apostle are a quotation from the second chapter of Haggai, who prophesied after the return of the Jews from Babylon, and during the rebuilding of the city and Temple. He foretells the second destruction of the Jewish political and religious State, and the substitution of the kingdom of Christ in their stead. St. Paul’s main object in writing this Epistle was to confirm the Hebrew Christians in their newly received faith, and to guard them against the apostacy to which they were tempted by those Jews who rejected Christ as the Messiah. For this purpose, he directs them to the approaching abolition of the Mosaic system, and to the permanence of the kingdom of Christ, both foretold by the prophets. Through-

out the Epistle he had been labouring to prove the superiority of the Christian to the Jewish dispensation, and that the latter had been useful mainly as introductory to the former, inasmuch as it had been "the bringing in of a better hope, by the which we draw nigh unto God" (Heb. vii. 19). He concludes his argument by showing that the Mosaic institutions, having accomplished their purpose, were about to be finally abolished, and the Gospel of Christ substituted; and as, at the giving of the law, "the earth shook, and Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God" (Ps. lxxviii. 7), so, at the proclamation of the Gospel in its place, God declares, "Yet once more I will shake the heavens and the earth, and I will overthrow the throne of the kingdoms" (Haggai ii. 21; Heb. xii. 26). The expression, "once more," implies that there had been previous shakings of the symbolical "heaven and earth." The State and the Church of the Jews (the first indicated by "the earth," and the second by "heaven") had been *shaken* by the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, which resulted in the destruction of the Temple and the captivity of the nation in Babylon. At the time when St. Paul wrote his Epistle the native government had been subverted, and Judea was subject to the Roman power. But "the *heavens*," as well as "the *earth*," were now on the eve not only of

being *shaken*, but of being *removed*, never to be restored; the ecclesiastical as well as the civil constitution was about to be abolished in the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Most appropriate, therefore, and cogent is the reasoning of the apostle: "And this word, *Yet once more*, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made" (*i.e.* the Jewish Church and State), "that those things which cannot be shaken" (namely, the Gospel, or the kingdom of Christ), "may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved" (*i.e.* the Gospel dispensation, which, unlike the Mosaic, is not a preliminary, but a final revelation, "a kingdom set up by the God of heaven, never to be destroyed"—Dan. ii. 44), "let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 27—29).

Only those amongst the Israelites who were divinely taught were able "steadfastly to look to the end of that which is abolished" (2 Cor. iii. 13). All others of the nation assumed that the sun (their church) would never be darkened, and that the moon (their civil government) would never cease to give her light. They failed, failed utterly, to discern the meaning of the evangelical prophet's words—

“ And the moon shall be confounded, and the sun shall
be ashamed ;
For Jehovah God of hosts shall reign
On Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem ;
And before his ancients shall He be glorified ”
(Isa. xxiv. 23, Lowth’s translation).

The explanation of the text under consideration is in harmony with that of the following noted expositors of Scripture.

Dr. John Lightfoot, referring to the words, “ It shall come to pass in the last days,” &c., says, “ Conceits are taken up by divers in our times upon this place, as if visions and prophetic gifts should be poured upon men towards the end of the world ; misconstruing the phrase of ‘ *the last days* ’ to mean the latter end of the world, whereas it meaneth the last days of the Jews’ world or State ;—and misconceiving ‘ the great and terrible day of the Lord ’ to mean the day of judgment, whereas it meaneth nothing else than the day of Jerusalem’s destruction.”—*Lightfoot’s Works*, vol. vi. p. 174.

The Rev. T. Hartwell Horne explains “ the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood ” as “ a figurative representation of a total eclipse, in which the sun is entirely darkened, and the moon assumes a bloody hue : it signifies the fall of the civil and ecclesiastical State in Judea.”—*Horne’s Introduction*, vol. iv. p. 549.

Dr. Boothroyd, in a note on Joel ii. 30, says, "This and the next verse refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the sun and moon being turned into blood show how the princes and leading men should be slain. Compare Matt. xxiv. 29, &c., and Luke xxi. 25."—*Boothroyd's Bible*.

Dr. G. S. Faber writes, "The blackening of the sun, the turning of the moon into blood, the falling of the stars, and the departing of the heavens like a scroll, mean the subversion of a kingdom. The eclipsing of the heavenly bodies means a partial calamity, not extending to the utter subversion of the kingdom."—(*Faber on the Prophecies*, vol. i. p. 90.) The authority of Dr. Whitby and of Dr. Doddridge may also be appealed to in favour of the interpretation given.

The Rev. Richard Watson states strikingly the design of God in thus shaking "not the earth only, but also heaven:"—"Thus the 'heaven' of the Jews was 'shaken,' and all its stars fell; that the eyes of all men might behold the Sun of righteousness, and the whole earth might be filled with his glory."—*Sermons*, vol. ii. p. 403.

II.

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”
—2 PETER iii. 10, 13.

We have been considering the words uttered by St. Peter on the day of Pentecost; the words now quoted were written by the same apostle nearly forty years subsequently—one at the commencement, the other at the close of his ministry. We have to inquire whether the literal interpretation of these words is that which accords with the mind of the Holy Spirit, or whether the apostle's written expressions should, like his verbal utterances, be regarded as symbolical, and interpreted accordingly.

The literal interpretation is more popular. Is it more correct?

Those who adopt it consider that it refers to the day of final judgment, and they believe that, as certainly as the old world was destroyed by the Deluge, so certainly will the earth that now is be destroyed by fire, and that the heavens also will be consumed by the same devouring

element (ver. 7), and that then a new material earth and new material heavens will be created.

The advocates of the symbolic interpretation understand that, by "the heavens," the apostle refers to the Jewish ecclesiastical constitution, given by God from heaven to Moses; and by "the earth," he means their civil constitution as a nation, these terms being so applied in the Old Testament; their consumption by fire indicating their utter destruction. And by "the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," they understand a new and reformed state of things, both in the universal Church and in all earthly governments, consequent on Christ's kingdom being universally established in the hearts of his followers. Then "the heavens shall rejoice, and the earth be glad."

The object of St. Peter, the apostle of the circumcision, in writing this, his Second Epistle, was to establish and confirm the Hebrew Christians in their faith, "lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, they should fall from their own steadfastness" (ver. 18). To secure this result, he endeavours to "stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance, that they may be mindful," he says, "of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the

commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour" (ver. 1, 2). There is no word spoken by the holy prophets in the Old Testament which clearly foretells the destruction of the material heavens and earth, or the day of final judgment. Those passages which speak so exultingly of Christ coming to "judge the earth," refer, unquestionably, to the establishment of his heavenly kingdom on earth. But as, in order to the introduction of this, it was necessary that the Mosaic institutions should be abolished, very numerous prophecies declaring this great revolution are found in the Old Testament. As the main body of the Jewish people had rejected the Messiah and his glad tidings of salvation, they became the subjects of Divine wrath, and the victims of his righteous anger. This had been one great theme of "all the holy prophets." Speaking of Messiah's enemies, the inspired psalmist says—

"In the time of thy wrath,
Thou shalt place them as in a furnace of fire;
Jehovah shall destroy them in his fury,
And the fire shall devour them"

(Ps. xxi. 9, French and Skinner's version).

The prophet Malachi, evidently referring to the same destruction, says—

“For behold the day cometh which shall burn as a
furnace,
And all the proud, and all that do wickedness shall
be as stubble ;
And the day that cometh shall burn them up,
Saith Jehovah, God of hosts :
For it shall not leave them root or branch ”
(Mal. iv. 1, Newcombe’s version).

(A proverbial expression to denote entire consumption.) Consequent on this destruction, the new creation is inaugurated ; “ the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,” begin to dawn on the prophet’s vision, and hence he beautifully adds—

“ But unto you that fear my name
Shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in
his wings ” (Mal. iv. 2).

Christ, the Sun of righteousness, the fountain of light and of life, the source of warmth and of beauty and of fruitfulness, rose upon the chaos of the moral world, and dispelled the darkness that covered the earth, and the gross darkness that covered the people (Isa. lx. 2). As in the creation of the material world, so in the new creation, “ God said, Let there be light, and there was light.”

It was probably to such glorious predictions that the apostle Peter referred, when he exhorted

the followers of Christ to be "mindful of the words spoken before by the holy prophets." And if we further consider that the unbelieving Jews were the most bitter and unrelenting persecutors of all who acknowledged Christ as the Messiah, the propriety of the apostle's exhortation will be obvious. In his former Epistle he had warned them that "the time had come when judgment must begin at the house of God;" and he added, "If it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" (1 Peter iv. 17.) In this Second Epistle he points out more definitely what their end shall be. It had been foretold by "the holy prophets," as well as by our Lord himself; and, at the time of the apostle's writing, these predictions were on the eve of being accomplished. St. James adopted a similar style in writing to those Jewish Christians who suffered persecution. He reminds them that "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh;" and again, "Behold, the Judge standeth before the door" (James v. 8, 9).

It would appear that the apostle Peter, anticipating the near approach of this great spiritual revolution, and wishing to confirm his converts by directing them to the prophecies now about to be fulfilled, adopted the highly figurative language which our Lord himself had employed

when foretelling the same events. Almost all prophecies are expressed in language highly figurative or symbolical. Some reasons for this have been already given. A special reason might have led our Saviour to adopt this style in reference to this special event. As Dr. Jortin observes, "He might possibly do it to perplex the unbelieving, persecuting Jews, if his discourse should ever fall into their hands, that they might not learn to avoid the impending evil." The Spirit of Christ which inspired the holy prophets, and by which He himself was led to adopt this method, prompted the apostles also to adopt the same style, probably for the same reason. From the acting of one and the selfsame Spirit, a similar course might be expected.

In foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, our Lord adopted the symbolic language in which the prophets had expressed their predictions. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days" (*i.e.* the tribulation caused by the Roman invasion) "shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (Matt. xxiv. 29). This was a declaration that the existing spiritual and temporal power of Judaism should be abolished, that "the sceptre

should depart from Judah;" and this was to take place before the generation then on earth should have passed away (ver. 34).

To the same effect, and in language similar, though somewhat varied, St. Peter says, "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise" (ver. 10), and in (ver. 12), "The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved." The darkening of the sun and the moon, and the falling of the stars, as expressed by our Lord, foretell the same events as those which the apostle describes under the imagery of the heavens passing away with a great noise, and the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved. The use of three distinctive figures to describe one event proves that this language cannot be interpreted literally. The heavenly bodies cannot actually pass away with a great noise, and likewise be dissolved by fire, and also, as elsewhere stated, fall from heaven (Matt. xxiv. 29).

Our Lord, in his discourse, connected the destruction caused by the Deluge with the destruction of Jerusalem; and the apostle does the same. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man" (Luke xvii. 26). And Peter, remembering his Master's words, makes the same allusion. Reprobating the conduct of certain scoffers who asked, "Where is the promise of his coming? for, since

the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as from the beginning of the creation," he denies their false assertion, the result of wilful ignorance. He declares that, so far from all things having continued as from the creation, God had, by the Deluge, destroyed the world which He had created. His words are, "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water; whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished;" and then he proceeds to foretell, apparently, that the symbolic heavens and the symbolic earth (the Jewish ritual and State) "by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." This is what had been foretold by the holy prophets, and by our Lord himself. If any object that this transition from the literal to the figurative is forced and unnatural, it may be replied that the apostle only followed, in this respect, the precedent of the ancient prophets. God, by the mouth of Isaiah, reproves his people for forgetting the Lord their Maker, "who hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth" (Isa. li. 13). The material heavens and the material earth are here spoken of. In the sixteenth verse He comforts them with the promise of restoration after their

captivity by the same expressions used figuratively: "I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee with the shadow of my hand; that I may stretch forth the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people" (see Lowth's version). In this latter verse the stretching forth of the heavens signifies the restoration, after their return from Babylon, of the Temple worship and the ecclesiastical constitution; and the laying of the foundation of the earth, the re-establishment of the political State.

It is necessary to observe that St. Peter distinguishes between "the heavens that were of old" and "the heavens that are now;" between "the world that then was," and "the earth that is now." He says that "the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." This can be true only of "the world of the ungodly," the sensual race who had filled the earth with violence. The physical earth, so far from perishing, was, we may reasonably believe, improved; for the alluvial deposits left by the subsidence of the waters must have greatly improved the land, and made it far more productive. Hence, probably, permission was granted to Noah to eat *flesh*. The material earth that now is must be essentially the same as the material earth that then was: changes may have taken place on its

surface, but it is the same physical earth—not perished, but probably improved. “The material heavens which are now” are precisely the same as “the material heavens that were of old;” for they were wholly unaffected by our earthly Deluge. It was the ungodly world that perished; and the apostle refers to this extraordinary judgment to assure the believers that, as the material heavens and the material earth had been created by the word of the Lord, so, by that same word, the symbolical heavens and earth (*i.e.* the Jewish Church and State) should be destroyed.

The world of the ungodly was destroyed by water: “the heavens and the earth which are now” are to be consumed by a still more destructive element, by fire (ver. 7). In foretelling this, the apostle adopts the diction of the old prophets. God, by the mouth of Moses, thus speaks of the ultimate rejection of his people:—

“A fire is kindled in mine anger,
And shall burn to the lowest hell;
And shall consume the earth with her increase,
And set on fire the foundations of the mountains”
(Deut. xxxii. 22).

When the apostle says, “The earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up,” he seems to have adopted the language of Nahum in foretelling the destruction of Nineveh: “The

earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein" (i. 5). And when he says, "Looking for and hastening" (or earnestly desiring) "the coming of the day of God" (Alford's version), he appears to remember the words of Zephaniah, "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly" (i. 14). By the great day of the Lord, described as being near, and hasting greatly, the prophet refers to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans: the apostle probably refers to the approaching destruction of the same city by the Romans.

The superlative vanity of the Jewish nation led them to regard the destruction of their city and Temple as equivalent to the destruction of the whole world; and they would speak of the end of their religious and civil polity as the end of the world. In illustration of this, some extracts from their writings may be both interesting and useful. The author of the Book of Esdras says, "All this have I spoken before thee, O Lord, because thou madest the world for our sakes. As for the other people, which also come of Adam, thou hast said that they are nothing, but are like unto spittle" (2 Esdras vi. 55, 56). Dr. Lightfoot quotes from the Talmud several remarkable passages on this subject: "Seventy souls went down with Jacob into

Egypt, that they might restore the seventy families dispersed by the confusion of tongues; *for those seventy souls were equal to all the families of the whole world.* And he that would be ruling over them, is as if he would usurp a tyranny over the whole world" (vol. xii. p. 57). Again: "These are those disciples of the Law for whom the world was made; who sit in judgment, and stablish the world" (p. 145). Men cherishing such vainglorious notions would naturally regard the destruction of the nation for whom (as they alleged) the world was made, as the destruction of the world itself. They did not scruple to affirm, "The nations of the world are compared to dogs."—*Lightfoot's Works*, vol. iii. p. 97.

Another circumstance must be kept in mind by the English reader: it is this—that the inflated and highly figurative style which characterizes all Oriental writings was very naturally the style adopted by the Jewish prophets. We have seen in what terms Moses had foretold the destruction of the nation, describing it as the result of "a fire kindled in God's anger, which should burn to the lowest hell, and consume the earth with her increase," &c. (Deut. xxxii. 22). The prophet Isaiah, foretelling the desolation of Judea by Nebuchadnezzar (perhaps that also subsequently by Titus), describes it as the desolation of the world: "The earth mourneth and fadeth

away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish" (Isa. xxiv. 4).

Jeremiah, referring to the same calamity, speaks of the desolation of his country as being a return of the world to its original chaos:—

"I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void :

And the heavens, and they had no light :

I beheld the mountains, and lo, they trembled,

And all the hills moved lightly :

I beheld, and lo, there was no man,

And all the birds of the heavens were fled :

I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness,

And all the cities thereof were broken down

At the presence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger !" (Jer. iv. 23—26.)

To the English mind, the language of both these prophets, as well as that of Moses, seems to indicate the dissolution of the universe ; but it is plain that no such catastrophe is here predicted. All that is foretold is the destruction of God's chosen people, and of the city which He had chosen, and concerning which He had said, "This is my rest *for ever* : here will I dwell, for I have desired it" (Ps. cxxxii. 14). By the Jew this destruction was considered as equivalent to the destruction of the whole world.

Fire, being the most destructive of all the

elements, is chosen by the sacred writers to symbolize the agency by which God punishes or destroys the wicked. The destruction of Sennacherib and his army is thus foretold :—

“ And the Light of Israel shall become a fire,
And his Holy One a flame ;
And He shall burn and consume his thorn,
And his brier, in one day :
Even the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field,
From the soul even unto the flesh, shall He consume ;
And it shall be as one fleeth out of the fire ! ”

(Isa. x. 17, 18, Lowth's version.)

This prophecy was fulfilled when “ the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand ” (Isa. xxxvii. 36). The destructive element was the symbol of God's destructive power ; but we have no reason to suppose that fire was literally employed.

In another place the same prophet thus foretells the same destruction of Sennacherib and his army :—

“ For Tophet is ordained of old ;
Even the same for the king is prepared :
He hath made it deep ; He hath made it large ;
A fiery pyre, and abundance of fuel ;
And the breath of Jehovah, like a stream of sulphur,
shall kindle it ”

(Isa. xxx. 33, Lowth's version).

Had not this prophecy been accomplished as recorded, we should have felt sure that the Assyrian king and his army were doomed to perish by fire; but we know from sacred history that the army was smitten by the angel of the Lord, and that Sennacherib was slain by his two sons whilst "worshipping in the house of Nisroch, his god" (Isa. xxxvii. 38). The element of fire is chosen as the symbol of utter destruction. So we read in another place, "Wickedness burneth as the fire" (Isa. ix. 18).

In the first and second chapters of Amos we have predictions of seven nations whose destruction is described by God himself kindling a fire on the walls or in the palaces of each. The destruction was really accomplished by the Assyrian and Babylonian armies: the element of fire is chosen as the symbol of that destruction, to denote their entire consumption.

In the prophecy of Ezekiel we have a remarkable instance of the symbolic use of fire as the agent of destruction: "Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the south" (*i.e.* towards Judea, the prophet being in Chaldea), "and drop thy word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field" (*i.e.* Jerusalem), "and say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I

will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree; the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces, from the south to the north, shall be burned therein. And all flesh shall see that I, the Lord, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched" (Ezek. xx. 45—48).

In this prophecy Jerusalem is compared to a forest of trees to be consumed by fire. The prediction was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judea, took Jerusalem, burnt the city and Temple, and desolated the whole country. Our Lord appears to have referred to this prophecy on two occasions. One was when, speaking of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies, He turned to the women who followed bewailing and lamenting Him, and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children, &c. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke xxiii. 27—31.) The other reference to the words of Ezekiel appears in his discourse on future punishment, which He describes as "the fire that never shall be quenched" (Mark ix. 43). Our Saviour's words, viewed in connection with those of Ezekiel, are suggestive.

When the apostle Peter foretells the impending destruction of Jerusalem and of the Mosaic eco-

nomys, being himself "mindful of the words spoken by the holy prophets," and whose style had been adopted by our Lord in foretelling the same event, he uses the language and employs the symbols which the ancient prophets had, as it were, consecrated. He speaks of the heavens being dissolved, and the earth also, and the works therein, being burnt up; meaning by the former that the ecclesiastical system shall be destroyed; and by the latter, the civil constitution of the Jewish State. He speaks, also, of the elements melting with fervent heat. These elements could not be the material elements of which our earth is composed, for in the apostle's time these were believed to be fire, air, earth, and water. To melt fire by fervent heat is absurd. Air is rarefied by heat, earth is hardened, and water is boiled and evaporates. The literal interpretation cannot, therefore, be maintained. We must, consequently, adopt the symbolical interpretation, and ascertain the meaning of the symbol as used in other portions of Holy Writ.

In no part of the Old Testament does the word *element* occur. Consequently, the "melting of the elements by fervent heat" cannot be included in "the words spoken before by the holy prophets;" yet it is to these words that St. Peter directs the minds of the Jewish believers in this third chapter of his Epistle. The word is found in four other

places in the New Testament, and in these four cases the sense is uniform. It occurs twice in the Epistle to the Galatians, and twice in the Epistle to the Colossians. In each of these places St. Paul applies the term *elements* to the Mosaic ritual, which he asserts had been superseded by the Gospel. In both Epistles the apostle is earnestly contending against the Judaising teachers (the Ritualists of the primitive Church), who taught men to seek justification by the observance of rites and ceremonies. He reminds the Galatians that before they received the Gospel, they, as well as himself, "were in bondage under the *elements* of the world" (iv. 3). And now, when through faith they had been delivered from that bondage, and had become the children of God and the heirs of God through Christ, he asks with grief and astonishment, "How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly *elements*, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" (ver. 9.)

To the Colossians, who were exposed to the same danger from the same false teachers, he says, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments," or *elements* (see margin), "of the world, and not after Christ" (ii. 8). And again (ver. 20), "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments" (or *elements*) "of the world, why, as though living in the world" (*i.e.* under a dis-

pensation of forms, instead of the dispensation of the Spirit), “are ye subject to ordinances?” The Mosaic dispensation, of which the Jewish Temple with its ceremonial services was the exponent, was the machinery by which God instructed the human family in the rudiments or elements of religious truth. It was the alphabet, the illustrated spelling-book, prepared to convey religious ideas in the infancy of the human family. It was preparatory to the Gospel; provisional and introductory, not permanent; so that when the Gospel was introduced, it “vanished away.” Then, when the substance of which it was but the shadow was revealed, “the heaven and the earth,” symbolizing the Jewish ecclesiastical and civil polity, passed away; the elements, such as the Temple and all its sacred vessels and utensils, were consumed and melted with fervent heat; and the Jewish heavens and earth having passed away, God, by the establishment of the kingdom of Christ, began to fulfil his promise, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind” (Isa. lxxv. 17).

Lightfoot thus interprets St. Peter’s predictions:—“When the apostle speaks of the heavens being dissolved by fire, and the earth and the works therein burnt up, and the elements melting with fervent heat, he intends no other thing than

the dissolving of the Jewish Church and economy by fiery vengeance ; the consumption of their State by the flame of God's indignation ; and the ruin of their elements of religion. . . . Not the elements in Aristotle's sense, of fire, air, earth, and water ; but the elements in his brother Paul's sense—the carnal and beggarly elements of their Mosaic rites and traditionary institutions.”—*Lightfoot's Works*, vol. vi. p. 292.

The remarks of Bishop Warburton on our Lord's prophecy respecting the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple are equally applicable to the predictions of St. Peter at the close of his Epistle :—“ The prophecy of Jesus, concerning the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, is expressed in such high and swelling terms, that not only the modern interpreters, but the ancient likewise, have supposed that our Lord interweaves into it a DIRECT prediction of his second coming to judgment. Hence arose a current opinion of *those* times that the consummation of all things was at hand ; which hath afforded a handle to an infidel objection in *these* [times], insinuating that Jesus, in order to keep his followers attached to his service, and patient under sufferings, flattered them with the near approach of those rewards which completed all their views and expectations. To which the defenders of religion have opposed this answer : That the

distinction of short and long, in the duration of time, is lost in eternity ; and with the Almighty, *a thousand years are but as yesterday, &c.*

“ But the principle both go upon is false ; and if what hath been said be duly weighed, it will appear that the parts of this prophecy which mark a speedy advent do not respect God’s *second* coming to judgment, but his *first*, in the abolition of the Jewish polity, and the ESTABLISHMENT of the Christian ; that *kingdom of Christ* which commenced on the total ceasing of the *Theocracy*. For as God’s reign over the Jews entirely ended with the abolition of the *Temple service*, so the reign of Christ, *in spirit and in truth*, had then its first beginning.

“ This was the true ESTABLISHMENT of Christianity ; not that effected by the *donations* or *conversions* of *Constantine*. Till the Jewish law was abolished, over which the *Father* presided as King, the reign of the *Son* could not take place ; because the sovereignty of *Christ* over mankind was that very sovereignty of God over the Jews, *transferred* and more largely extended.

“ This, therefore, being one of the most important eras in the economy of grace, and the most awful revolution in all God’s religious dispensations, we see the elegance and the propriety of the terms in question to denote so *great an event*, together with the *destruction of*

Jerusalem by which it was effected : for in the old prophetic language, the change and fall of principalities and powers, whether *spiritual* or *civil*, are signified by the shaking heaven and earth, the darkening the sun and moon, and the falling of the stars ; as the rise and establishment of *new ones* are by processions in the clouds of heaven, by the sound of trumpets, and the assembling together of hosts and congregations.”—*Warburton's Works*, vol. viii. p. 47.

Some commentators think that the destruction of Jerusalem was an event the magnitude of which does not adequately correspond with the strong language used by the apostle. But the destruction of “the city of God” must not be regarded like the destruction of any other city, such as Nineveh, Babylon, &c. Nor must it be considered as the final accomplishment of the apostle’s prediction ; it was only preliminary ; it was the clearing away of decayed and useless material, in order that the foundations might be laid of God’s spiritual and universal temple. The strong language of the apostle corresponds well with the great revolution foretold. And if the Creator’s power would be manifested by the destruction of this material world, how much more gloriously would it be illustrated by his creating anew the moral and spiritual world, “the new heavens and the new earth, wherein

dwelleth righteousness!" Such an interpretation of St. Peter's words appears to manifest the glory of God far more than the destruction of the universe which He has created, and in which he takes delight (Ps. civ. 31). The establishment of a spiritual kingdom over "all people, nations, and languages" was the very purpose for which Christ came into the world, and suffered and died. Everything opposed to this kingdom must be destroyed utterly. "The fire shall burn up thine adversaries" (Isa. xxvi. 11, Lowth).

Great light may be thrown on the closing chapter of St. Peter's Second Epistle by connecting it with one of his earliest efforts to preach the Gospel. It has already been shown how the symbolical language he used on the day of Pentecost harmonizes with that adopted in the close of this Epistle. A still more remarkable coincidence of thought and language may be traced. He states his object in writing this Second Epistle to be to "stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets," &c. It has been already shown that "the holy prophets" scarcely said anything about the day of final judgment, which is popularly thought to be the subject of St. Peter's writing. But in one of his earliest addresses the apostle declares plainly what was the subject

of "the words spoken before by the holy prophets;" for, speaking of the exaltation of Christ, the great Regenerator, he says, "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts iii. 21). It is not, therefore, the *destruction*, but the *restitution* of all things which is the great theme of "all the holy prophets," and of which St. Peter is desirous that Christians should be mindful. He commenced his ministry by preaching this great truth—the cardinal truth of the Gospel; and now that he is about "to put off his earthly tabernacle," he exhorts them, in the early part of this Epistle, to "give all diligence to make their calling and election sure, that so an entrance may be ministered to them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter i. 10, 11). He adds, "Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance" (ver. 15). Accordingly, at the close of his Epistle, he puts in a permanent form what had been foretold by the holy prophets concerning the Jewish Church and State (symbolized by the heavens and the earth), whose destruction both prophets and apostles had foretold, in order that the new heavens and the new earth, "wherein dwelleth

righteousness," might supersede those which had "waxed old, and were ready to vanish away." In plain terms, the religion of forms and ceremonies must be abolished, and the dispensation of the life-giving Spirit be substituted: the corrupt secular government must be destroyed, in order that Christ, by writing on the hearts of men his laws of righteousness and charity, may, through the agency of Christian magistrates, "judge the people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment" (Ps. lxxii. 2). "The removing of the things which may be shaken applies to every power, ecclesiastical or civil, that sets itself against the kingdom which cannot be moved."—*R. Watson.*

At the close of this chapter St. Peter thus speaks of the Epistles of his brother apostle: "Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you" (referring to the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews); and then he adds, "As also *in all his Epistles*, speaking in them of *these things*" (ver. 15, 16). Here we may ask, What are "*these things*" which occupy so prominent a place in all the Pauline Epistles? Evidently St. Peter refers to what he had just said concerning "the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (ver. 13); or, in other words, the new state of things, both ecclesiastical and poli-

tical, which should result from the Lord Jesus taking to himself his great power, and reigning in the hearts of men. Prior to the accomplishment of this great revolution, "the heavens and the earth which are now" (*i.e.* the Mosaic institution, both in Church and State) must pass away, and be dissolved.

That "*these things*" form the great subject of St. Paul's Epistles will be admitted by all who are intimately acquainted with them. The destruction of the material heavens and earth, as it forms no part whatever of the Gospel, finds no place whatever in the writing or the preaching of St. Paul. But the abolition of the Mosaic institutions, both religious and political, in order that the kingdom of Christ, "the dispensation of the Spirit," might be substituted—this forms the great theme of the apostle of the Gentiles. When writing to the Hebrew Christians, he adopts the symbolic language in which this great revolution had been foretold by Moses, by the prophets, and by our Lord himself; but when writing to Gentile Churches he uses plain language to set forth the same truth: this is seen in his Epistles to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, &c. It will be both interesting and profitable to examine carefully what St. Peter's precise meaning is when he says of the writings of

St. Paul, "As also in *all* his Epistles, speaking in them of *these things*," referring, of course, to the subjects on which he himself had been writing.

Take, first, St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Throughout this great Epistle we find not a single word about the destruction of the heavens and earth. The apostle's grand argument is to prove that, under the Gospel, God is not the God of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. Hence he quotes the ancient prophecies, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people;" and again, "Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles, and laud Him, all ye people" (Rom. xv. 10, 11). The complete fulfilment of the apostle's desire would be the realisation of what Daniel saw in vision when he "beheld One like the Son of man, who came with the clouds of heaven," and to whom was given "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him" (Dan. vii. 14). "*These things*" are the subject of the great Epistle to the Romans, as well as of his other Epistles, and must have been the subject dwelt upon at the close of St. Peter's Second Epistle, otherwise this reference to St. Paul's writing would have been utterly irrelevant.

In St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians his main object is to prove that the great design of Christ's death was "that the blessing promised to Abraham

might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ ; that we"—both Jews and Gentiles—"might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. iii. 14). And he shows that the covenant made with Abraham comprehended all the spiritual seed : "There is neither Jew nor Greek : for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (iii. 28). "*These things*" are the subject of the Epistle to the Galatians, as of the Epistle to the Romans ; but in both there is an entire absence of any intimation that "the heavens and the earth are to pass away."

The same argument is pursued in the Epistle to the Ephesians. He speaks of "the mystery which was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit ; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel" (Eph. iii. 5, 6). In the first chapter of this Epistle he gives a significant intimation of a more full accomplishment of what had been revealed in vision to Daniel. He declares the purpose of the God and Father of all to be, "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him" (i. 10). But in this, as in the other Epistles, not even a hint is given that the heavens and the earth are to be destroyed. What, then,

are we to understand by "*these things*," of which St. Peter was writing, and of which he affirms that his brother Paul, "in all his Epistles," speaks?

To the Colossians he writes in the same strain. He tells them that in the new creation "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all" (iii. 10, 11). He also declares it to be the Divine purpose, "having made peace through the blood of his cross, by Him to reconcile all things to himself; whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. i. 20); by which, probably, we are to understand that all earthly institutions, whether ecclesiastical or political, are to be brought into harmony with the Divine mind, and based upon those eternal principles of truth and righteousness on which the throne of God, the universal Governor, is established. "*These things*" occupy a prominent place in this valuable Epistle: its subject is, not the destruction, but "the restitution of all things," through the death, the resurrection, and exaltation of "the Son of man."

We may search all the Epistles of Paul to the Gentile Churches, and we shall not find a single word about "the heavens passing away with a great noise, or the elements melting with fervent heat, or the earth and the works therein being

burnt up." Yet these are the words of the apostle Peter, and it is in reference to what he was then writing he declared that in *all* his Epistles his beloved brother Paul spoke of "*these things*." How are we to reconcile this apparent contradiction? Obviously St. Peter declares in symbolic language what St. Paul teaches in plain speech. When writing to the Hebrew Christians both apostles adopted symbolic language, because their converts, being familiar with the prophetic writings, easily understood their style. Had St. Paul written in symbolic language to the Gentile Churches, they would have been perplexed, and would not have apprehended his meaning any more than the mass of modern Christians do now. The apostle of the Gentiles, "in all his Epistles," points to the universal reign of Christ, when "all people, and nations, and languages shall serve Him." The apostle of the circumcision expresses in symbolic language his earnest longing for the same result when he says, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." And both apostles base their hopes on "the words spoken by the holy prophets."

It is very evident that when St. Peter wrote this Second Epistle, he penned it under the full conviction that his own end, and that of the Jewish Church and State, were alike approaching. He

could never have forgotten the parting words of his Divine Master, prophetic of his martyrdom, "When thou shalt be old, another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not," "signifying by what death he should glorify God" (John xxi. 18, 19). With this prediction of his own fate, he would connect the intimation given simultaneously concerning St. John, "If I will that he tarry *till I come*, what is that to thee?" (ver. 22). And now, by observing the signs of the times, by hearing that "the abomination of desolation" was approaching the holy place, he felt that the hour of his martyrdom was approaching, and expresses his conviction in these words: "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me" (2 Peter i. 14). He knew that "the time had come when judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter iv. 17), and he endeavoured to prepare the minds of his converts for "the fiery trial which was to try them" (ver. 12). He therefore exhorts them to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of the apostles of the Lord and Saviour" (2 Peter iii. 2). The great convulsions about to take place had all been foretold in "the sure word of prophecy;" and whilst these would be most disastrous to scoffers, and to those "who obey not the

Gospel of God," they would prove, both to Jews and Gentiles, the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus, and would result in the establishment of that spiritual agency by which the new creation is to be effected. "And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. xxi. 5).

III.

"And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"—REV. vi. 12—17.

These words record a remarkable vision seen by the author of the Apocalypse. Being a vision only, the description of it must not be understood literally as an historical narrative. When we read the account of Daniel's vision of the ram with two horns, and the he-goat with one notable horn, we know that the ram symbolizes the King of

Media and Persia, and the he-goat the King of Greece. A literal interpretation of what the prophet saw would render the vision insignificant; and a literal interpretation of what St. John beheld would render his vision absurd. How are the stars of heaven to fall to the earth? Astronomers tell us that there are eighteen millions in the Milky Way alone, many of which are larger than our globe! Yet John Wesley, in his "Commentary," says, "Yea, and surely they will fall, let astronomers fix their magnitude as they please." Such comments may tend to make thoughtful and well-educated men become infidels, whilst they will not make intelligent Christians more devout. Did this eminent teacher thus literally interpret the vision of Daniel when the prophet beheld the little horn (the symbol of Antiochus Epiphanes), which "waxed great, even to the host of heaven, and cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them?" (Dan. viii. 9, 10.) Nothing could show more clearly than this absurd comment, made by a shrewd critic, the importance of having some sound and well-defined principles of interpretation applicable to all portions of the inspired volume.

It has been shown in the preceding pages that Moses, the first of the inspired writers, foretold, in highly symbolic language, the utter destruction

of everything connected with that dispensation which he himself had introduced (Deut. xxxii. 22). Prophets followed in the same strain. Our Lord himself predicted the same event in similar language. The apostles imitated the example of their Master. So that, in the closing book of Scripture, the apostle John, when "the time was at hand," dwells on this momentous subject—the destruction of the old Jewish world—the kingdom which had "waxed old, and was ready to vanish away," preparatory to the establishment of Christ's universal empire—the "kingdom which cannot be moved."

St. John beheld in a vision the events which had been foretold by the ancient prophets and by our Lord. When the sixth seal was opened "there was a great earthquake." An earthquake symbolizes any extraordinary and unexpected revolution in the state of affairs, civil or ecclesiastical (see Cruden's "Concordance"). The giving of the law was preceded by an earthquake: "the whole mountain quaked greatly" (Exod. xix. 18). When our Lord on the cross "yielded up the ghost," "the earth did quake, and the rocks were rent" (Matt. xxvii. 51); and when He rose again "there was a great earthquake." So now, when the Jewish system is about to expire, and the Prince of Life about to ascend his throne and reign for ever, the vision

of a great earthquake announces the approach of this momentous revolution.

After the earthquake St. John records that the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood. The prophet Joel, quoted by St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, had foretold the approaching revolution by similar imagery: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood" (Joel ii. 31; Acts ii. 20). Our Lord, also, had adopted the same phraseology in reference to the same event (Matt. xxiv. 29).

Not only are the sun and the moon thus obliterated, but St. John sees in vision "the stars of heaven fall unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together." This description very closely resembles that of Isaiah, when announcing God's judgments against the Edomites and other enemies of his Church:—

"And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved;
And the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll;
And all their host shall fall down,
As the leaf falleth off from the vine,
And as a falling fig from the fig-tree"
(Isa. xxxiv. 4).

This prophecy, whilst relating primarily to the

Idumeans, applies, likewise, to all the enemies of God's Church. At the time St. John wrote, the Jews were its most bitter and determined foes. Their impending fate was revealed to the apostle, as one of the events respecting which he was told "the time is at hand" (Rev. i. 3).

As Isaiah, in foretelling the first desolation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, describes the mighty men and the mean men as alike going "into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth" (chap. ii.), so St. John beholds "the kings of the earth, and the great men, &c., and every bondman, and every freeman, hiding themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains" (Rev. vi. 15). He also hears them cry to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" (vi. 16, 17.) The prophet Hosea had employed much the same imagery to describe the desolation of Samaria by the Assyrian army: "They shall say to the mountains, Cover us! and to the hills, Fall on us!" (Hosea x. 8.) (It is well known that Palestine abounds in rocks and caverns.) The words of Hosea were adopted by our Lord when referring to the fate of Jerusalem: "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us! and to the hills, Cover us!" (Luke

xxiii. 30.) The exclamation, "For the great day of his wrath is come," &c., corresponds with the words of our Lord, when speaking of the desolation of Jerusalem, "These be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke xxi. 22). "All things which are written" corresponds with "the words of all the holy prophets," &c. The rocks and the mountains which his enemies invoked to fall on them were then to be the refuges of safety to his people; for He had warned them that when they saw Jerusalem encompassed with armies, "then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains." This they did, and found safety in Pella, and in the mountainous district in which it was situated.

All God's judgments, whether under the present or under former dispensations, whether inflicted on his chosen people or on their adversaries, ought to be regarded by us as sign-posts, directing us to the final judgment, when "He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained" (Acts xvii. 31).

Towards the close of the Apocalypse St. John records the vision he had of this most solemn judgment: "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them" (Rev. xx. 11).

Now this cannot possibly refer to the material earth, or to the material heavens. These, were they to "flee away," must still occupy a place in some part of the universe. But supposing such a stupendous flight to occur, what moral influence can it have on the souls of men about to be "judged according to the deeds done in the body, and to receive according to what they have done, whether it be good or bad?" The true meaning of the passage appears to be that when Christ comes to establish his spiritual kingdom over all nations and peoples and languages, all temporal power, symbolized by the earth, and all ecclesiastical power, symbolized by the heavens, shall vanish and disappear before "the great white throne, and Him that sits on it," and He alone shall reign, "God over all, blessed for ever." Then the saints on earth will join with the angelic hosts in singing, "Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!"

May not this be the fulfilment of what Nebuchadnezzar beheld in his dream, and which Daniel interpreted? "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon the feet of iron and clay, and brake them in pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, *that no*

place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth” (Dan. ii. 34, 35).

Dr. Macknight concludes his essay on “The Right Interpretation of the Language of Scripture” with the following valuable remarks:—
“Thus it appears that the highly figurative expressions in the Jewish Scriptures, which are so offensive to modern ears and to minute philosophers, were occasioned by the poverty of the first language of mankind; that the boldest of these figures were derived from the ancient picture-writing; that the symbols used in that kind of writing gave rise to the dark Egyptian allegory, which was held in great estimation at the time the Scriptures were written; and that in the early ages, mankind, whether barbarous or civilised, were accustomed to express their sentiments and feelings by significant actions, as well as by significant sounds. These things being considered, it cannot be matter either of surprise or of blame that the Jewish prophets exhorted the people and foretold future events in such figurative language as, to us moderns, appears extravagant; or that they delivered their exhortations and predictions in dark allegories, formed on the qualities and the circumstances of the symbols by which the persons and nations, concerning whom they prophesied, were denoted in picture-writing; or even that, on

extraordinary occasions, they foretold things future by what may be called a drama continued through a great length of time, in which they spake and acted things which excited the wonder of the spectators, and led them to inquire what the prophets meant by them, and when explained, could not but make a strong impression on their imagination. These things were all done suitably to the genius and manners of the times, and were easily understood by the people for whose instruction they were intended.

“The highly figurative language by which the Jewish Scriptures are so strongly marked, together with the allegorical and typical senses with which they abound, and the extraordinary things done by the Jewish prophets, instead of being instances of absurdity and signs of imposture, are proofs of their antiquity and authenticity, and even strong presumptions of the Divine original of the revelations contained in these venerable writings.”

SECTION IV.—ERRORS RESULTING FROM IGNORANCE OF THE SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE OF SCRIPTURE.

(1.)—*Transubstantiation.*

Very serious and even fatal errors prevailed in the Jewish Church in consequence of their interpreting literally what was expressed symbolically.

The glowing predictions respecting the glory of Messiah's kingdom — his triumph over all his enemies, the homage to be paid to Him by all kings, who were to bow down before Him, and by all nations, who were to serve Him (Ps. lxxii.) — were understood by them *literally* instead of *figuratively*, and materially instead of spiritually. They could not, like those enlightened by the Holy Spirit, behold his inward glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John i. 14). They did not look for "a Deliverer out of Zion who should turn away ungodliness from Jacob," but for a mighty King and Conqueror, who should deliver them from the Roman yoke, and who should exalt the seed of Abraham to reign over the nations of the earth. They looked for a Monarch whose victories should surpass those of David, and whose wealth should exceed that of Solomon. So, when they beheld Him externally poor and weak, they despised and rejected Him; and He who was "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his substance," was, in their carnal eyes, "as a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness, and without beauty that they should desire Him" (Isa. liii. 2).

From these false principles of interpreting Scripture, the most fatal consequences resulted. The Jews rejected Him whom God had sent to

be their Deliverer; they crucified the Lord of glory; and, as a punishment for this unparalleled crime, their country was desolated, their city and Temple consumed with fire, and the seed of Abraham, God's peculiar people, were scattered throughout the world. St. Paul, preaching at Antioch, declared that this misapprehension was the cause of their rejecting the Christ: "For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath-day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him" (Acts xiii. 27). Had they known "the voices of the prophets," who, in the Holy Scripture, "testified of Him," they "would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

The Christian Church, also, like the Jewish, has been led into grave errors by understanding literally what evidently ought to be interpreted as symbolic. The bread which our Saviour broke with his own hands, and gave to his disciples, saying, "This is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me," could be intended only as the symbol of his body, which at the time had not been broken at all. The wine, likewise, was the symbol of his blood, not shed as yet, but to be shed for the remission of our sins. Nothing could be more simple than this ordinance; and the object of it is expressed

in the command, "Do this in *remembrance* of me." The Lord's Supper, as spoken of in the New Testament, bears, in its exquisite simplicity, the stamp of its Divine origin. It commemorates the sacrifice of Christ, the great fact on which depends our salvation. Its observance by Christians ever since the death and resurrection of their Lord is the strongest evidence of the truth of those facts on which the Gospel rests. By its devout celebration the faith, the love of believers is nourished, and thus the unity of the Church is promoted. Whenever the disciples of Christ meet to obey, scripturally and intelligently, their Lord's command, they may fully rely on his spiritual presence. What more can faith desire?

The comparatively novel, but intensely absurd doctrine of transubstantiation has resulted from a literal interpretation of symbolic language. Apply the same principle to other passages of Scripture, and you are involved in countless absurdities. Our Lord, as offering himself a sacrifice for our sins, is described as "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world." As the Defender of his Church, He is represented as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." Adopt the principle of interpretation involved in the doctrine of transubstantiation, and we must regard Him as a real Lamb, and likewise as a real Lion!

The perversion of the Lord's Supper from its

original simplicity is one of the heresies originated by the Romish Church in the dark ages, prior to the introduction of printing. It was unknown in the primitive Church, and it was not until the thirteenth century that it was declared by the Pope to be an article of the Christian faith. Dr. Mosheim says, "It was reserved for Innocent III. to put an end to the liberty which every Christian had hitherto enjoyed, of interpreting this presence in the manner most agreeable to the declarations of Scripture, and to decide in favour of the most absurd and monstrous doctrine that the frenzy of superstition was capable of inventing."—*Mosheim's History*, vol. iii. p. 217.

This gross perversion of a most simple ordinance has led to idolatrous worship. Dr. Middleton, referring to "that celebrated act of Popish idolatry, the adoration of the host," says, "As oft as I have been standing by at *mass*, and seen the whole congregation prostrate on the ground, in the humblest posture of adoring, at the elevation of this consecrated piece of bread, I could not help reflecting on a passage of Tully, where, speaking of the absurdity of the heathens in the choice of their gods, he says, 'But was any man ever so mad as to take that which he feeds upon for a god?' This was an extravagance reserved for Popery alone; and what an old Roman could

not but think too gross even for Egyptian idolatry to swallow is now become the *principal part of worship* and the distinguishing article of faith in the Church of Rome.”—*Letter from Rome*, p. 351.

These gross perversions of Scripture prove great stumbling-blocks in the way of thoughtful and intelligent men, and afford opportunities to infidels and heathens to scorn the religion of Christ, which in itself is one of perfect simplicity and of common sense. Mahommedans, Parsees, and Hindoos must alike revolt at notions and practices so absurd. Those who thus pervert the words of the living God would do well to consider the declaration of our Lord: “Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” (Matt. xviii. 7.) It has been well said, by an eminent divine, “Men, indeed, have made an obscure Bible; but God never did.”—*Lightfoot*, vol. vii. p. 214.

Dr. Farrar, in his recent admirable work, “The Life of Christ,” says:—

“The ‘transubstantiation’ and ‘sacramental’ controversies which have raged for centuries round the Feast of Communion and Christian love are as heart-saddening as they are strange and needless. They would never have arisen if it had been sufficiently observed that it was a

characteristic of Christ's teaching to adopt the language of picture and of emotion. But to turn metaphor into fact, poetry into prose, rhetoric into logic, parable into systematic theology, is at once fatal and absurd. It was to warn us against such errors that Jesus said so emphatically, 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life' (John vi. 63)" (vol. ii. p. 292, note).*

(2.)—*Personal Reign of Christ on Earth.*

Many Christians, like the ancient Jews, form false notions of Christ's kingdom by interpreting literally the symbolic language in which it is described by the prophets. It is pre-eminently a spiritual kingdom; but its progress and triumph are foretold in metaphors taken from earthly and material objects. To assimilate Christ's spiritual kingdom to the kingdoms of this world is to rob it of its distinctive character, its supreme glory. "Those views of the kingdom of Christ," says Richard Watson, "which mingle themselves with worldly aggrandisement and the pomp and wrath of a conqueror, harmonize with the carnal prejudices of the Jews, and ill accord with his real character."—*Sermons*, vol. ii. p. 173.

Yet the pomp and majesty of a great conqueror

* See Note A, p. 471.

are frequently chosen as figures to set forth the glories and triumphs of the mighty Redeemer; and, if these figures are rightly interpreted, nothing can be more impressive. When the psalmist thus invokes Messiah, "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty" (Ps. xlv. 3), by the sword we are to understand his Word, "the sword of the Spirit," *i.e.* his Gospel. This is plain, for He is to "ride forth and prosper in the cause of truth, meekness, and righteousness" (ver. 4). His sword is not to "destroy men's lives," but to destroy their sins, and thus to save them from what would destroy them eternally.

We read in another Psalm, "All kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him" (Ps. lxxii. 11). How will this prediction be accomplished? Only by the omnipotent Saviour writing on the hearts of men his law of truth and love, and thus "creating all things new." His Word, "the sword that proceedeth out of his mouth," wielded by the Divine Spirit, is the agency by which all evil is to be destroyed in man, and by which the kingdom of God is to be established within him—that kingdom which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17). "It is a spiritual kingdom," says the author already quoted: "those who set up an earthly, visible one, set up a new principle. This is the case especially with those

who contend for Christ's personal reign on earth at Jerusalem."—*Watson's Sermons*.

But suppose, as some imagine, our Lord were to come to reign personally on earth, and to hold his court, like an Eastern monarch, in Jerusalem, what might we anticipate as the result? Will his bodily presence accomplish that which his Word and his Spirit have failed to do? The influence of his personal appearance could be only very limited, and the effect may be questionable. Few, except the wealthy and the strong, who from distant parts of the earth could undertake a long and costly journey, could obtain an interview. The multitudes, to whom on his first coming He paid especial attention, and who "heard Him gladly," dare not cherish the most distant hope of seeing Him. And it may be questioned whether, in all cases, spiritual good would result from any visual perception of his person. Of the great religious teachers who beheld and heard Him when on earth, He said mournfully, "They have both seen and hated both me and my Father" (John xv. 24). The same state of heart which made the Jews hate the Son when they saw Him would certainly have the same effect on modern professing Christians. Self-righteousness, pride, impenitence, and worldliness would produce the same result now as they did eighteen hundred years ago. "The

world" would hate Him now as much as it did then, whenever He "testified that the works thereof are evil" (John vii. 7).

But it will be said, by those who look for a bodily presence of the Lord, that "his second coming will be widely different from his first: this was in lowliness and poverty; when He shall come again it will be in the glory of his Father." What are we to understand by this? Even in his deepest humility and poverty there were some who "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The dark shadows of humility and poverty served, as the background of a picture, to make more radiant the Divine majesty, the tender compassion, the spotless purity of his life. The Jews, blinded by prejudice and unable to discern spiritual excellence, "saw no beauty in Him that they should desire Him." He was to them "as a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness" (Isa. liii. 2). No display of outward glory would have changed their hearts. We read that when Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrim, "all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts vi. 15). Yet, notwithstanding this glory of his countenance, the very men who beheld it "gnashed upon him with their teeth;"

they cried out with a loud noise, stopped their ears, ran upon him with one accord, cast him out of the city, and stoned him to death ; whilst his spirit, radiant as his countenance, prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts vii. 54, 60). What outward glory, whether in the face of the disciple or in the person of the Divine Master himself, could soften the hearts of such men ? One who was "consenting to his death" was not converted by the angelic brightness of the martyr's face ; but when He heard the pleading voice of Jesus, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?" he trembled ; the language of his heart was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?" and, instead of "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts ix. 1), "he preached that faith which he once destroyed" (Gal. i. 23).

(3.)—*The Custom of Bowing at the Name of Jesus.*

"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow."—
PHIL. ii. 10.

The practice which these words have been supposed to enjoin affords a striking illustration of the tendency in the human mind to rest in what is external and material, instead of realising the spiritual. In many places of worship,

whenever the name of Jesus is sounded, the custom prevails of bowing the head or the knee ; and this is done in obedience to the command supposed to be expressed in the text. The question must often have occurred to thoughtful worshippers *why* this homage should be paid to the Son especially, and why the same reverential posture should not be assumed whenever the name of the Eternal Father or the Holy Spirit is uttered. The true meaning of the apostle is that all men are to give to Christ, the King of Zion, the homage of their hearts and minds, and to render unreserved obedience to his commands. Bowing the knee is an act of homage equivalent to that enjoined by the psalmist, " Kiss the Son, lest He be angry " (Ps. ii. 12). Both these are usually paid to Oriental sovereigns. The outward expression of homage is easily performed ; but spiritually to bow the knee to Christ is to yield to Him the throne of our hearts, and to render an unreserved obedience to his will. We bow the knee to Christ when we love Him supremely, and love one another as He has loved us ; when we love our enemies, and do good to those who hate us. If, whilst we render to Him an external homage which He has not enjoined, we withhold from Him the homage of our hearts which He so justly claims, we are guilty of gross hypocrisy, and our worship, instead of being

acceptable to Him, is like "the sacrifice of the wicked, an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. xv. 8).

It should be kept in mind that the "name" in Scripture is generally expressive of some office, or of something distinctive in the character. Of Him to whom "every knee is to bow," it is said, "His name shall be called Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us" (Matt. i. 23). Isaiah had prophesied of Him:—

"His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,
The mighty God, the Father of the everlasting age,
the Prince of peace" (ix. 6, Lowth's version).

It is to One invested with these Divine attributes that we are to render the homage of our hearts, and whom "all men are to honour, even as they honour the Father" (John v. 23).

(4.)—*Destruction of the Heavens and Earth.*

The popular notion that the destruction of the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars is predicted in Holy Scripture, has originated mainly in the error of interpreting symbolic language as ordinary expressions. The most prominent theme of prophecy is the universal extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the predictions

concerning it are expressed in language highly metaphorical. The apostles dwell upon the same subject, and, except when writing to the Hebrew Christians, speak of it in plain language. Thus St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, declares that "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii. 10, 11). Had the Jews, as a nation, received the Gospel when preached to them by the apostles; had they recognised Christ as the promised Messiah, and submitted to his authority, the transition from Judaism to Christianity would have been effected by "the still small voice;" they would have been gathered into the Christian fold, and with the Gentile believers formed "one flock under one Shepherd." But when they rebelliously said, "We will not have this Man to reign over us;" when they despised Him whom the Father had sent, saying, "They will reverence my Son;" when they "cast Him out of the vineyard and slew Him," they filled up the measure of their iniquity. Consequently, the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost (1 Thess. ii. 16). The Lord "pleaded" with them no longer with the voice of mercy, but "by fire and by his sword" (Isa. lxvi. 16). Their city, "the city of God," and their "holy and beautiful house, the Temple of the Lord," were utterly

consumed. This unprecedented calamity had been foretold by our Lord in the symbolic language of "the holy prophets:" "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (Matt. xxiv. 29). The interpreting of this symbolic language literally, originates many contradictions in Scripture. To give but one example: Daniel says that "they who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars *for ever and ever*" (xii. 3). Our Lord says, "The stars shall fall from heaven." How are these sayings to be reconciled? Only by understanding the prophet's words literally, and those of our Lord symbolically.

The "new creation" spoken of by the holy prophets, and by the apostles of the Lord and Saviour, and by the exalted Son of God himself, is not a new creation of the material earth or heavens, subsequent to the supposed destruction of God's universe, but the creating of men "in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. iv. 24), and in their being "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created them" (Col. iii. 10). This spiritual regeneration infinitely transcends in value any possible re-creation of the material heavens and earth. Of what advantage would a new material earth be to mankind? That which

we now inhabit is precisely the same as that which the Almighty Creator pronounced "very good." And although He subsequently said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake" (Gen. iii. 17), there is no reason to conclude that any change in the material elements occurred in consequence. The barrenness and want of cultivation are the result mainly of the wickedness of men. Tyranny and violence, rendering both life and property insecure, discourage the cultivation of the earth: in this way is fulfilled the threatened judgment, "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee" (ver. 18). But when Christ "shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth," then--

"Truth shall spring out of the earth;
And righteousness shall look down from heaven;
Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good,
And our land shall yield her increase"

(Ps. lxxxv. 11, 12).

This will be the natural consequence of righteousness and peace. At present every nation in Europe is impoverished by its warlike preparations. Fruitful lands are turned "into barrenness for the wickedness of them that dwell therein" (Ps. cvii. 34). Sin brings its own curse; the

two are inseparable, and ever will be, the one consequent on the other.

And as to the heavenly bodies, what benefit, either morally or physically, could man derive from their being created anew? If "the light of the moon is to be" *literally* "as the light of the sun;" and if "the light of the sun" is to be *literally* "sevenfold, as the light of seven days" (Isa. xxx. 26), unless a corresponding alteration be made in our organs of vision, the fulfilment of this promise must prove a great calamity to the human family. We should all be blinded! But God has, with infinite wisdom and mercy, adapted both the heavens and the earth to the condition of man whilst resident here. No change is needed in "the heavens and the earth" which "God in the beginning created" (Gen. i. 1). The new creation required is in men's hearts, and in those states of the Church and of earthly governments which, in prophetic language, are symbolized by the heavens and the earth. This regeneration can be effected only by the power of "the Spirit of God," who, when "the earth was without form and void," "moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. i. 2), and thus initiated the great work of creation.

That the blessings to result from this new creation are spiritual, rather than material, is evident from the context: "Behold, I create

new heavens and a new earth," for, adds the Almighty, "be ye glad, and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy." And the result of this new creation is thus symbolically described: "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord" (Isa. lxxv. 17, 18, 25). Universal peace will be the result of universal righteousness.

The permanence of this renewed state of things is indicated in the following chapter of Isaiah, in which the Creator says, "As the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain" (Isa. lxxvi. 22). The new heavens and the new earth are identical with "the kingdom which cannot be moved," of which the apostle speaks when writing to the Hebrews, and which he contrasts with the Mosaic institutions in Church and State (*i.e.* the Jewish heavens and the Jewish earth), which he speaks of as "that which decayeth and waxeth old, ready to vanish away" (Heb. viii. 13).

This "restitution of all things," or the "making of all things new," or the "creating of new heavens and a new earth" (all which expressions denote one and the same work), was commenced

when John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" when he pointed to Christ as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and as He who alone can "baptize with the Holy Ghost." When the disciples asked their Master, "Why then say the scribes that Elijah must come first?" He replied, "Elijah truly cometh, and *shall restore all things*" (Matt. xvii. 10, 11): by which we are to understand, not that he completed the restoration of all things, but that he initiated that work by which God would eventually make all things new in the moral and spiritual world. Through Him who is "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" through Him who alone can supply that which alone can impart life to men dead in trespasses and sins—the baptism of the Holy Spirit—the minds of men are to be renewed; and the Infinite Creator is to behold, in the new spiritual world, all the work which He has made, and to pronounce all very good. Then the "former heavens and earth shall not be remembered, nor come to mind" (Isa. lxxv. 17).

How many ages may be required to complete this "restitution of all things" we cannot possibly tell, because God has not revealed "the times and the seasons:" these He "hath put at

his own disposal" (Acts i. 7, Boothroyd's version). The pregnant words of Bishop Butler well deserve our attentive consideration, whenever we contemplate any portion of the Divine government:—"Men are impatient, and for precipitating things; but the Author of Nature appears deliberate throughout his operations, accomplishing his natural ends by slow, successive steps. And there is a plan of things beforehand laid out, which, from the nature of it, requires various systems of means, as well as length of time, in order to the carrying on of its several parts into execution."—(*Butler's Works*, vol. i. p. 232.) The principles which we trace in the government of the material world we may expect to see developed in the government of the moral and spiritual world.

The remarks of Dr. Paley are applicable, and worthy of attentive consideration:—"We ought constantly to bear in mind this momentous truth, that, in the hands of the Deity, time is nothing; that He has eternity to act in. The Christian dispensation, nay, the world itself, may be in its infancy. A more perfect display of the power of Christ and of his religion may be in reserve; and the ages which it may endure after the obstacles and impediments to its reception are removed may be, beyond comparison, longer than those which we have seen, in which it has been strug-

gling with great difficulties, and most especially with ignorance and prejudice.”—*Paley’s Sermons*.

In that most mysterious portion of Scripture, the Book of Revelation, we find some light on “the mystery of God,” apparently in reference to the final triumph of our Lord, and possibly as to the duration of our earth. In the tenth chapter the angel solemnly declares that there shall be delay (not time, as in the authorised version) no longer; but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound; “the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to his servants the prophets” (x. 6, 7). In the eleventh chapter and fifteenth verse we learn the result of the seventh angel sounding, for we read, “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever.” In this glorious result we see “the mystery of God” accomplished. Thus the prediction of one of the latest prophets shall be fulfilled, “The Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one” (Zech. xiv. 9).

When this “mystery of God shall be finished;” when “the kingdoms of this world shall have

become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ;" when this glorious consummation shall have been realised, what are we to anticipate? Are we to respond to the song of the ancient Church, "The Lord reigneth: let the earth rejoice: let the multitude of isles be glad thereof?" (Ps. xcvi. 1.) Are we to realise the fulfilment of the promise, "Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us?" (Ps. lxxv. 6.) Nothing of the kind, according to some teachers. On the contrary, when the great result has been accomplished of which the holy prophets wrote, and of which the sweet psalmists of Israel sang, in hope of which the noble army of martyrs shed their blood, and for which the Son of God himself "poured forth his soul unto death," then we may look for the great catastrophe! Our earth, instead of "yielding her increase," is, with all that is therein, to be burnt up; "the elements are to melt with fervent heat," and "the stars are to fall from heaven." Is this to be consequent on our Lord's universal dominion? When harmony and beauty are restored to the spiritual world; when man is renewed in holiness, "after the image of Him that created him," is this the crisis chosen by the all-wise God for the most appalling desolation throughout the universe? Such a notion is as preposterous as it is unscriptural. The sacred writer

declares that, when “the kingdom of the world shall become our Lord’s, and his Christ’s, He shall reign for ever and ever” (Boothroyd’s version).

We shall return to this subject at the close of the ensuing chapter on Hebrew Idioms, and show what influence they have had in spreading this popular error respecting the destruction of the heavens and the earth.



CHAPTER V.

IDIOMS.

THE Hebrew language, like most others, has many idioms, *i.e.* modes of expression peculiar to itself. These must be discerned and understood by the Scripture student, or the meaning of the inspired writer will not be apprehended. Many supposed contradictions in the Bible are the result of interpreting Hebrew idioms as ordinary English expressions. Correct principles of interpretation would disclose to us harmony and beauty, where we often imagine there is contradiction or inconsistency.

SECTION I.—THE HEBREW MODE OF EXPRESSING DEGREES OF COMPARISON.

According to the Rev. T. Hartwell Horne, “the Hebrew is the most ancient language in the world.” It is, therefore, as might be expected, very simple in its construction. It has

not, like most modern languages, the comparative and the superlative degrees of comparison. What we, in English, express comparatively by saying, "Mercy is better than sacrifice," they express by a positive assertion, qualified by a negative: "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice" (Hosea vi. 6). Now, as sacrifice had been very particularly enjoined by God, the meaning of these words must be, "I value mercy more than sacrifice."

Having no superlative degree of comparison, they frequently express it by connecting with the greatest objects the name of the infinite Creator. Thus the loftiest trees are called "the trees of God," and the loftiest mountains "the mountains of God." Nimrod, being an extraordinary hunter, is called "a mighty hunter before the Lord;" and an evil spirit of superlative malignity is described as "an evil spirit from the Lord."

On this subject the Rev. Hartwell Horne thus writes:—"The Jews, having no superlatives in their language, employed the words *of God* or *of the Lord* to denote the greatness or excellency of a thing. Thus a beautiful garden is called *the garden of the Lord*. . . . Nineveh is termed an exceeding great city; which, in the original Hebrew, is *a city great to God*. The like mode of expression occurs in the New Testament. Thus,

in Acts vii. 20, Moses is said to have been, literally, fair to God; or, as it is correctly rendered in our version, *exceeding fair*. And in 2 Cor. x. 4 the weapons of our warfare are termed, literally, *mighty to God*, i.e. *exceeding powerful*; not *mighty through God*, as in our authorised version.”—*Horne’s Introduction*, vol. ii. p. 25.

When the builders of Babel proposed to erect “a tower whose top should reach to heaven,” all that they meant was an exceedingly high tower, “just as the cities of the Canaanites were said to be great, and walled up to heaven” (Deut. i. 28); or as Homer speaks of a pine-tree “high as heaven.”—*Speaker’s Commentary*, Gen. xi. 4.

Bishop Newton, commenting on the words, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. xxiv. 35), observes, “It is a common figure of speech in the Oriental languages to say of two things that the one shall be, and the other shall not be, when the meaning is only that the one shall happen sooner, or more easily, than the other. The meaning of our Saviour’s words is, ‘Heaven and earth shall sooner, or more easily, pass away than my words shall pass away; the frame of the universe shall sooner, or more easily, be dissolved than my words shall not be fulfilled.’ And thus it is expressed by St. Luke upon a like occasion (xvi. 17): ‘It is easier for heaven and earth to pass,

than one tittle of the law to fail.'”—*Prophecies*, p. 426.

The diversity of language adopted by the two evangelists to express the same truth may be easily accounted for. St. Matthew wrote chiefly for the Hebrew Christians, and therefore he retained the Hebrew idiom; St. Luke wrote for the Gentile Christians, and therefore adopted the mode of expression with which they were most familiar.

This idiom is of frequent occurrence in the sacred Scriptures. When God declares to his people, “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee” (Isa. liv. 10), this is not a prediction that the mountains shall actually depart, or that the hills shall be removed, but an assurance that sooner shall “the everlasting mountains” and “the eternal hills” be removed than God’s kindness towards his people shall fail, or the promises of his covenant be broken.

As another example of this Hebrew idiom we may quote a passage from the prophecy of Jeremiah: “I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them, in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them,

saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Jer. vii. 22). On this passage Dr. Samuel Clarke observes, "There is here a considerable difficulty in the expression, because it seems, in the English translation, as if it were a denial of God having instituted sacrifices at all, which would be a direct contradiction to the whole Scripture history. But it is a very remarkable idiom in the original, and deserves, therefore, to be observed carefully, for the right understanding of this and many other like places; that what in modern language is always expressed in one sentence by words comparative, the Hebrew usually expresses in two distinct periods, by affirming concerning one thing, and denying of another, what is intended to be only comparative between both. The sense, therefore, of these words, 'I spake not to your fathers concerning sacrifices,' is, I spake not concerning them as if they were of the same importance as moral obedience. That this is the true interpretation of the phrase there is evident proof in the parallel place (Hosea vi. 6), where the prophet, using that same expression, '*I desired mercy, and not sacrifice,*' explains it comparatively in the very next words, 'and the knowledge of God, more than burnt offerings.' And from this idiom of the Hebrew language the same manner of speaking has been sometimes derived into the New Testament. Thus

(Matt. xv. 24), 'I am not sent,' saith our Saviour, 'but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' His meaning is not absolute, that He was not sent at all to any other than the Jews only, but that He was not sent so soon, so immediately, so principally; his mission was not to be made known so early to any other nation as to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Again (John xii. 44), 'He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on Him that sent me;' that is, not so much, not so properly, on me as on Him that sent me. John xvii. 9: 'I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me.' These words have sometimes been alleged in proof of the absolute reprobation of the greatest part of mankind; but, from what has been now said concerning the nature of the Jewish language, it sufficiently appears that our Saviour's meaning was only to pray for his disciples more especially, and in a more particular manner than the rest of the world. Acts v. 4: 'Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God;' that is, not only unto men, not so much to mere men, as to God himself, who inspired them with his Holy Spirit." Dr. Clarke concludes, "Though this manner of expression seems now unusual to us, yet, in the language of the Jews at that time, it was very easy, and the meaning obvious."—*Clarke's Sermons*, vol. i. p. 79.

Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount contains many examples of this Hebrew idiom, which, when interpreted as English, has led to great misapprehension. For instance, where He says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," &c., "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven," He does not prohibit the former, but enjoins the superior duty of the latter; as he says subsequently, "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 19, 20, 33). Strictly to prohibit the laying up of treasures upon earth would be opposed to another scripture, in which the same idiom occurs: "The children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children" (2 Cor. xii. 14); *i.e.* it is the duty rather of parents to lay up for their children than of children to lay up for their parents. A literal interpretation of the first clause might be pleaded by an undutiful and selfish son as a reason why he should not assist an aged and afflicted parent!

Again, when our Lord commands, "I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. v. 39), his words are not to be understood in their strictly literal sense. All that He means is, that it is better for us to cherish a spirit of forgiveness than to indulge

resentment. The law of Moses, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," was strict justice, and was suited to the people to whom it was delivered, and who were unprepared to receive the Divine law of love. But in the law of Christ, which enjoins love and forgiveness, "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (James ii. 13). Had our Lord intended that his words should be understood literally, He would have enforced his precept by his own example: instead of this, we read that when, in the presence of the Sanhedrim, "one of the officers of the high priest struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?" our Lord, so far from inviting a second blow, reproved his assailant by saying, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John xviii. 22.) The apostle Paul did not understand the precept of our Saviour as enjoining tame and unresisting submission to injustice; for when, in similar circumstances to those of his Divine Master, the high priest commanded, "Smite that man on the mouth," his answer, prompted by an indignant sense of wrong, was, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" (Acts xxiii. 3.) In each answer the supremacy of the law is asserted; but in one we

see the dignity, "the meekness, and the gentleness of Christ;" in the other, the honest, though perhaps hasty, retort of one who followed his Master, but who, like another disciple, "followed afar off" (Luke xxii. 54).

In the same discourse, when our Lord says, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 19), we are to understand of the former that "he shall of all men be the farthest from ever entering therein" (see Dr. S. Clarke's Sermons, vol. i. p. 433).

When the psalmist asks, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee" (Ps. lxxiii. 25), he merely asserts that his desire after God is vastly more intense than any earthly desire. Supreme love to our Father in heaven does not destroy our natural affections: it refines them, and brings them into harmony with the Divine will; hence they yield us purer enjoyment.

When St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God," his meaning, in plain English, is, that the keeping of God's commandments is incom-

parably more important than the observance or non-observance of the rite referred to (1 Cor. vii. 19).

When St. Peter, giving rules for the dress of Christian women, says, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter iii. 3, 4), he does not prohibit all ornament in dress, but urges them to attend more especially to the inward adorning of a meek and quiet spirit, knowing that if they make this their chief concern, they will not be extravagant in their external adorning (see, also, 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10).

When our Saviour says, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast *hid* these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. xi. 25), we are to understand that God reveals his truth to the humble and teachable disciple, rather than to those "who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight" (Isa. v. 21).

A very remarkable illustration occurs in Luke xiv. 26, where our Saviour says, "If any man come to me, and *hate* not his father, and mother,

and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Literally interpreted, it would appear that our Lord came into the world to make us all intense man haters; whereas we know that his great object was to teach us to love one another, even as He loved us. We are commanded to honour our parents, not to hate them (Eph. vi. 2). Husbands are exhorted to love their wives, "even as Christ loved the Church" (Eph. v. 25). We are commanded to love even our enemies by the same voice which apparently requires us to hate our nearest relatives. How, then, are commands so diametrically opposite to be reconciled? The recognition of this Hebrew idiom enables us to ascertain our Lord's meaning, which is that, if we would be his disciples, we must love Him more fervently than we love our dearest earthly friends and relatives.

The most striking example of this Hebrew idiom occurs in the well-known text, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. ix. 13).

As these words, through disregard of the Hebrew idiom, have been greatly misunderstood, and serious errors have consequently been accepted as Gospel truths, we purpose examining this text very carefully. The process of investigation will illustrate the principle we have advo-

cated throughout—namely, of interpreting Scripture by Scripture.

Two questions suggest themselves. First, who are designated by the proper names “Jacob and Esau?” and, secondly, in what sense was the former loved, and the latter hated?

1st. Our first impression, on reading these names, is, that the two sons of Isaac, the twin brothers, are designated. A careful examination of other related portions of Scripture will prove this impression to be most false; that the statement has no reference to Jacob and Esau *personally*, but refers to the two nations which descended from them—the Israelites and the Edomites. Long after the death of each, the name Jacob, or Israel, is used to designate the whole nation, and that of Esau, or Edom, the people descended from him. As an example of the first, take the words of the psalmist, “When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad” (Ps. xiv. 7). Jeremiah furnishes us with an example of the second in his prophecy, “Concerning Edom, thus saith the Lord of hosts, I have made Esau bare,” &c. (xlix. 7, 10). That the two nations, and not the two individuals, are specified in the text under consideration, will be manifest if we refer to the announcement made to Rebecca shortly before their birth:

“Two *nations* are in thy womb, and two manner of *people* shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one *people* shall be stronger than the other *people*; and the elder shall serve the younger” (Gen. xxv. 23). It is in reference to this that God says, by the prophet Malachi, “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? Yet I loved Jacob, and hated Esau,* and laid his mountains and heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness” (Mal. i. 2, 3). It is from these words of the prophet that the apostle quotes in his Epistle to the Romans. That they refer, not to the two brothers, but to the two nations, may be demonstrated from sacred history. The heritage of Esau was not “laid waste” *while he possessed it*; on the contrary, it flourished, so that he became very rich and prospered greatly. In proof of this, he declined accepting the munificent presents of his brother, generously saying, “I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself” (Gen. xxxiii. 9). It was not until

* Dr. Boothroyd renders this, “Yet I loved Jacob, and disregarded Esau,” and adds, “God had favoured Jacob and his offspring, the Israelites, far more than Esau and the Edomites.” See, also, Newcombe *in loc.*, who interprets, “I loved Jacob, in giving him great external privileges. Esau I hated, *i.e.* I showed him less love. I comparatively hated him by giving him an inferior lot.”

several hundred years after that God "laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." This He did by the Chaldean armies subsequently to the destruction of Jerusalem and the laying waste of Jacob's heritage by Nebuchadnezzar.

We may further remark concerning that prophecy, "The elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. xxv. 23), that it never was fulfilled in the personal history of the two brothers. Esau never did serve Jacob. So far from this, we find Jacob calling Esau his lord, and acknowledging himself the servant of his brother: "Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant". (Gen. xxxiii. 14). The prophecy, "The elder shall serve the younger," was not fulfilled until the time of David, who subdued Edom, and made it subject to Israel (1 Chron. xviii. 12, 13). This was at least eight hundred years after the delivery of the prophecy concerning Jacob and Esau.

Having proved that the declaration, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," applies, not to the two brothers, but to the two nations descended from them, the Israelites and the Edomites, we proceed to inquire,

2nd. In what sense the former was loved, and the latter hated.

We have already, in this chapter, quoted

several examples of the peculiar Hebrew idiom by which preference of one thing above another is expressed, as, "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice," which is merely a declaration, "I prefer mercy to sacrifice" (see, also, Jer. vii. 22, 23). This mode of expression is frequent in the New Testament. St. Paul says, "Christ sent me, not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel" (1 Cor. i. 17). Now, it is certain that he *was* sent to baptize as well as to preach the Gospel; for the commission given to the apostles was to "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. xxviii. 19). The meaning, therefore, of the apostle is, that the commission to preach the Gospel was far more important than the commission to baptize. Thus the words, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," merely express the fact that God had shown more favour to one than to the other.

That God did not actually hate the Edomites may be most clearly demonstrated. Such a notion is irreconcilable with the plain assertion that "the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. cxlv. 9). His recorded dealings with this less favoured portion of "the seed of Abraham, his friend," are in harmony with this assurance of his unlimited goodness. A special command was given

to his chosen people *not to hate* the descendants of Esau: "Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother" (Deut. xxiii. 7). Now, if, as some imagine, God hated Esau and his descendants, would He have prohibited his people from hating them? Might we not rather expect that He would have enjoined on them the duty of hating all Edomites, and thus of being "followers of God, as dear children?" (Eph. v. 1.)

Even after the nation had been in existence about three centuries, during which time it had flourished, whilst Israel had been depressed and enslaved, God's tender care of Esau's seed was manifested in the injunction given to his now liberated people to abstain from injuring them: "Take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: meddle not with them, for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given Mount Seir unto Edom for a possession" (Deut. ii. 4, 5). This injunction is the more remarkable given as it was, notwithstanding the very unfriendly refusal of the Edomites to allow Israel to march through their land. "And Edom said, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword" (Num. xx. 18). Yet, so far from avenging themselves on this hostile people, God not only prohibited hatred and resentment, He also enjoined that "the children begotten of them shall

enter into the congregation of the Lord in their third generation" (Deut. xxiii. 8). Why was this merciful provision for their spiritual improvement made? Why was the door of admission to God's Church thus opened to the descendants of Esau? Why, but that they might be brought into the covenant made with Israel, and thus enjoy the privileges of God's chosen people?

It is worth noticing that one at least of Job's friends was descended from Esau—Eliphaz the Temanite; that he was the first to expostulate with his afflicted friend; and that to him the world is indebted for that most sublime description of his vision, the poetry of which so beautifully sets forth the truth enforced:—

“Now a thing was secretly brought to me,
And mine ear received a little thereof.
In thoughts from the visions of the night,
When deep sleep falleth on men,
Fear came upon me, and trembling,
Which made all my bones to shake.
Then a spirit passed before my face;
The hair of my flesh stood up.
It stood, but I could not discern its form;
A figure was before mine eyes;
There was silence: and I heard a voice, saying,
Shall a mortal be just before God?
Shall a man be pure before his Maker?”

(Job iv. 12—17, Boothroyd's version.)

These are not the words of one “hated” by his

Maker, or of one whose intellectual and moral "heritage" had been "laid waste."

One more proof that God did not hate the Edomites, even when inflicting on them righteous judgments, will suffice. That most tender and assuring exhortation, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me" (Jer. xlix. 11), was addressed to the descendants of the man concerning whom we read, "Esau have I hated."

Having shown that the declaration, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," respects not the two brothers, but the two nations descended from them—the Israelites and the Edomites—and having also shown that God did not hate this latter nation, but merely declares, in the words under consideration, that He had shown greater favour to the seed of Jacob than to that of Esau, it remains for us to inquire in what manner this preference was shown.

The peculiar favour bestowed on the Israelites consisted in their being made the visible Church of God, whilst the other nations of the world were left in a state of heathen darkness. Thus, St. Paul having first asked, "What advantage then hath the Jew?" answers, "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. iii. 1, 2). Nor was this all of their distinctive privileges. On the

fall of our first parents, God had given the promise of a Saviour who should assume the nature of those who had sinned ; and this promise was expressed in those ever-memorable words, “ The Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head ” (Gen. iii. 15). Each devout patriarch anxiously desired to be the father of the promised Seed. This distinguished honour was conferred on Abraham. To him God made the promise, “ In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ” (Gen. xxii. 18). The miraculous birth of Isaac was the first step towards the fulfilment of this promise. From him descended Esau and Jacob, each of whom became the father of a great nation—the former of the Edomites, the latter of the Israelites. Both were alike the seed of Abraham ; but God chose to limit the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant to his seed *in the line of Jacob*, to the exclusion of his seed in the line of Esau ; that is, He decreed that Christ should be born, not an Edomite, but an Israelite ; and that, until the appearance of the promised Seed, his visible Church should be composed, not of the seed of Esau, but of the seed of Jacob. *Why* He did so it is not for us to inquire. This is one of the many cases in which “ He giveth not account of any of his matters ” (Job xxxiii. 13). Most reverently and most cheerfully do we bow to the sovereignty of God, knowing that this

sovereignty, so far as his creatures are concerned, is the determination of Him who is infinitely holy, infinitely wise, and infinitely kind, however incomprehensible his acts may in some cases to us appear.

In consequence of this distinguishing favour, the Israelites enjoyed many advantages which were not granted to the Edomites and other Gentile nations. God established amongst them his Divine worship, and promised "in all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee" (Exod. xx. 24). He gave to them his holy Word and sent to them his holy prophets. When his Son entered the world, "He took upon Him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. ii. 16). During his earthly ministry his preaching and miracles were almost confined to the Jewish nation; and notwithstanding their unparalleled guilt in crucifying "the Lord of glory," yet, before his ascension, when He commissioned his apostles to preach the Gospel to all nations, He expressly enjoined them to *begin at Jerusalem* (Luke xxiv. 47). The superior privileges of the Jewish people are vividly set forth before them by the apostle Peter in one of his earliest efforts to preach to them the Gospel: "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall

all the families of the earth be blessed : unto you FIRST, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities " (Acts iii. 25, 26).

It is of the utmost importance to observe that these distinguishing privileges did not secure the eternal salvation of any of God's chosen people : this could be secured only by a due improvement of those privileges. Failing to do this, they exposed themselves to God's righteous displeasure. Hence, because of their unbelief, He declared of many, "So I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest" (Ps. xcv. 11). And when, after having been visited with repeated judgments on account of their transgressions, they, by the rejection of Messiah, "filled up the measure of their iniquities," they were rejected from being God's visible Church, and have continued in this state for more than eighteen hundred years. Their greater privileges involved them in greater responsibility ; and their neglecting to improve these exposed them to a more fearful condemnation.

As to the Edomites, it is acknowledged that their spiritual advantages were far inferior to those of the Jews ; yet they were not hereby excluded from eternal salvation. God "left not himself without a witness " among them (Acts xiv. 17).

To them, in common with other heathen nations, "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world" might have been "clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that" (if they continued ignorant of Him) "they were without excuse" (Rom. i. 20). And had they resolved to "seek after the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him," they might have learned that "He was not far from every one of us" (Acts xvii. 27).

The dispensations of God in reference to Jacob and Esau may be illustrated by our Lord's parable of the talents. An unequal division of these was made: to one servant, five were committed; to another, two; and to another, one (Matt. xxv. 15). The responsibility of each servant was great in proportion to the amount with which he had been intrusted. He who improved his two talents, so as to make them four, received the same commendation as he who improved his five, so as to make them ten. Had the man to whom five talents had been committed hid them in the earth, he would, no doubt, have incurred a heavier doom than the man who had so dealt with his one talent; and had this latter faithfully improved his one talent, he would have received with the other two an equal commendation and a proportionate reward. Now the

Israelites were intrusted with five talents ; the Edomites with only two ; and both were expected to improve them accordingly. Both alike proved unfaithful, and both, consequently, incurred punishment ; but the Israelites, having been favoured with more exalted privileges, incurred by far the heavier doom. " You only have I known," says Jehovah, " of all the families of the earth ; *therefore* will I punish you for all your iniquities " (Amos iii. 2). The extent of their punishment is indicated in the pathetic language of the patriotic Daniel, who, when interceding for his people, says, " Under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem " (Dan. ix. 12). Our Saviour, when foretelling the second destruction of this highly favoured city, says, " Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world unto this time ; no, nor ever shall be " (Matt. xxiv. 21). For eighteen centuries the chosen people of God have been marked out as the peculiar objects of Divine displeasure ; and scattered as they are throughout the world, they seem designed to warn all other nations not to abuse their privileges. Even in this world they have suffered more than any other people ; and that compassionate Redeemer who, when from the Mount of Olives He beheld the doomed city, wept over it, declared, " It shall be more

tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment," and even for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those Jewish cities to whom, though He preached, yet they repented not (Matt. xi. 22—24). This is in accordance with our Lord's teaching on another occasion: "The servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke xii. 47, 48). We may feel assured that this most equitable principle of the Divine government will be applied alike to all nations and to every individual.

It is very important to observe that when at last "the heritage of Esau was laid waste" by the Chaldeans, about twelve hundred years after his death, this judgment was not the consequence of his personal guilt, or of God's hatred of Esau, but the result of national guilt and impenitence. It was for their pride and for their cruelty and violence that they were thus visited. So the prophet Obadiah says, "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock" (ver. 3). The prophet Amos also writes, "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I

will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever" (Amos i. 11; see, also, Ps. cxxxvii. 7—10 and Ezek. xxv. 12—14). In the destruction of Edom the sons did "not bear the iniquity of the fathers;" the nation perished in its own corruption, thus illustrating the words of our Lord, "Whosoever the carcass is, thither will the eagles be gathered together" (Luke xvii. 37).

The too popular error of interpreting the prophet's words as applicable to the two brothers, instead of to the two nations, has been extended to the words of the apostle in his Epistle to the Romans, thereby depriving his argument of its point, and leading to conclusions which he never contemplated. His great object is to show that the admission of believing Gentiles into the Christian Church, and the rejection of all unbelieving Jews, were no violations of the covenant made with Abraham. They built their hopes on their natural descent from their great ancestor. By quoting the example of Esau, who was just as much the seed of Abraham as Jacob was, but who was cut off from any participation in the distinctive privileges of the Abrahamic covenant, he destroys their vain reliance on natural relationship, and shows that there is no unrighteousness

in God in determining that faith in Christ shall be the essential condition of admission into his church, whether for Jew or Gentile.

“God is love.” “He hates nothing which He has made.” Sin is the sole object of his abhorrence. He hated, not Esau himself, but his profaneness, when, “for one morsel of meat, he sold his birth-right” (Heb. xii. 16). He hated, also, the mean duplicity of Jacob, by which he had obtained his father’s blessing ; for the marks of Divine displeasure attended all his subsequent career, and embittered his life. Esau sought to kill him ; and this compelled him to leave his peaceful home. Laban deceived him, first in the substitution of Leah for Rachel, and then by “changing his wages ten times.” Reuben deceived him, and thereby embittered his domestic happiness. Simeon and Levi deceived him by their treachery and cruelty to Shechem, the son of Hamor (Gen. xxxiv.). His ten sons deceived him in leading him to suppose that his favourite, Joseph, was dead, “that some evil beast had devoured him :” his grief was so intense that he refused to be comforted, saying pathetically, “I will go down into the grave unto my son, mourning” (Gen. xxxvii. 33—36). How frequently and how bitterly must he have been reminded of his sin when, in early life, he had deceived his aged father !

God's love and God's hatred are fixed, not upon persons, but upon characters. "He loveth righteousness and judgment" (Ps. xxxiii. 5). He hates pride; He hates hypocrisy; He hates all unrighteousness. The imploring language addressed to his children by the God and Father of all is, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate" (Jer. xlv. 4). To his infinitely pure and holy nature all sin is infinitely abhorrent; consequently, the only way by which intelligent and moral beings can be made truly happy is by having their minds brought into harmony with the Divine mind.

It ought constantly to be kept in mind that the distinctive privileges conferred by God on the seed of Israel were not so much for themselves as for the whole human family. The Jews were the conservators of God's truth; they were his witnesses against idolatry; they were the offspring of him from whom descended the Messiah. God had chosen them "that they might be unto Him for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear" (Jer. xiii. 11). The judgment consequent on their unfaithfulness to their solemn trust is a warning to the whole world; and they appear to be scattered amongst the nations in order that their warning voice may everywhere be heard.

SECTION II.—THE IDIOM BY WHICH WORDS AND FEELINGS ARE ASCRIBED TO MEN, WHICH, THOUGH NOT EXPRESSED VERBALLY, ARE DECLARED BY THEIR CONDUCT.

The words of our Lord, referred to in the preceding section as illustrating the Hebrew mode of expressing degrees of comparison, will serve, also, to illustrate the idiom we are now to consider: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26). It has been shown that in these words our Lord enjoins on all his disciples the duty of loving Him more than all earthly relatives. But there is another aspect in which we may view these words. They require his followers, under given circumstances, to act as if they really hated their nearest relatives, and their own life also. Rather than deny his truth, we must be willing to part with all these objects of affection as readily as if they were the objects of our hate. This "the noble army of martyrs" have done in all ages, and thus declared their supreme love to Christ. "They loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. xii. 11).

A remarkable illustration of this idiom occurs

in the Old Testament. When David was indulging the bitterness of his grief for the death of his son Absalom, "Joab came into the house of the King, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, who this day have saved thy life, and the life of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; *in that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends*. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well" (2 Sam. xix. 5, 6). Joab did not mean to charge David with having verbally made such a declaration; he merely declared that the King acted like one who loved his enemies and hated his friends.

The earlier life of David affords us another example. He complains to Saul that his enemies had "driven him out from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods" (1 Sam. xxvi. 19). Not that any such language had been addressed to him either by Saul or by his servants; but they had driven him "out of the inheritance of the Lord" (*i.e.* "the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High"), and, by so doing, they had tempted him to commit that greatest of all sins, idolatry. The language of their *conduct* was, "Go, serve other gods."

We may go still further back in Scripture history, and trace the origin of this idiom to the writings of Moses. He commends the tribe of Levi, because he "said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant" (Deut. xxxiii. 9). The occasion referred to is that on which Moses, coming down from the mount, beheld the Israelites worshipping the golden calf. Prompted by holy indignation, he cried out, "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every one his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men" (Exod. xxxii. 26—28). It was by their conduct, not by their words, that Levi said to his father, "I have not seen him:" he acted towards his nearest relatives as if they had been utter strangers to him.

This peculiarity of Hebrew style may be traced in many passages of Scripture, and may throw light upon them. When our Lord says, "The

men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here," we are merely to understand that their conduct in repenting at the preaching of Jonas will condemn those Jewish cities to whom a greater than Jonas had been sent, but they repented not (Matt. xii. 41). When the apostle says of Noah, "He condemned the world" (Heb. xi. 7), we are to understand that he did this, not formally or judicially, but by his faith in the warning of God, and his obedience to the Divine commands, which formed a striking contrast to their unbelief.

In his First Epistle to the Corinthians (vi. 2) the apostle says, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" and in the following verse he asks, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" Some have supposed that the reference in both cases is to the final judgment, and that the saints are to be assessors with Christ on that solemn occasion. But how can this be reconciled with the fact that the saints themselves have to "appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body?" &c. (2 Cor. v. 10). Those who thus interpret the apostle's words sustain their views by the declaration of our

Lord, "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. xix. 28). But it is obvious that, whatever may be the meaning of these words, the prediction is limited to the apostles themselves, and to the twelve tribes of Israel to be judged by them. Christ sat upon the throne of his glory when He ascended into "heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark xvi. 19). Then was fulfilled the word, "Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Ps. cx. 1). Then was "all power given to Him in heaven and in earth;" and then the glorious work of regenerating the world was initiated. The new creation, to be completed finally in "the restitution of all things," was commenced. The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the miracles performed by his apostles, the destruction of Jerusalem and of "those his enemies who would not that He should reign over them," and the abolition of the Mosaic economy were the palpable proofs of his exaltation. Dr. Lightfoot gives the true sense of our Lord's words:—"The sitting of the apostles on thrones with Christ is not to be understood of their *persons* (because Judas Iscariot was now

one of their number), but it is meant of their *doctrine*; as if He had said, ‘When I shall bring judgment on this most unjust nation, then your doctrine, which you have preached in my name, shall judge and condemn them.’ See Rom. ii. 16.” —(*Lightfoot’s Works*, vol. xi. p. 254.) This accords with the words of our Lord, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John xii. 48).

This may help us to understand the meaning of the apostle’s words, “Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” There can be no doubt that the angels in question are those who kept not their first estate, and who are elsewhere designated “the rulers of the darkness of this world” (Eph. vi. 12). In the preceding verse St. Paul says that the *saints* are to judge the world; in this he says “*we* shall judge angels;” meaning by the pronoun, primarily, the apostles, with other preachers of the Gospel. We again quote Dr. Lightfoot:—“The apostle speaks of the ministers of the Gospel, himself and others, who, by the preaching of the Gospel and the name of Christ, should spoil the devils of their oracles and idols, should deprive them of their worships, should drive them out of their seats, and strip them of their dominion. Thus would

God subdue the whole world under Christian power, that Christian magistrates should judge men (as intimated in the words, 'the saints shall judge the world,' verse 2), and ministers of the Gospel should judge devils; 'i.e. destroy their dominion by proclaiming Christ's truth' (vol. xii. p. 483). All of which is in accordance with our Saviour's words, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John xii. 31, 32).

The judging, the condemning, and the expelling of fallen angels is a work still in progress; it takes place whenever the Gospel is preached, and accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit. Satan, "the god of this world," "rules in the children of disobedience." He is "the strong man armed, who keepeth his palace, and his goods are in peace." But when Christ, "a stronger than he," comes with the sword of the Spirit, "He taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke xi. 21, 22). This casting out of Satan—this judging of fallen angels—this destruction of their authority—is accomplished wherever the Gospel is proclaimed. In anticipation of it, our Lord, when the apostles returned from their first mission, declared, "I beheld Satan as lightning

fall from heaven" (Luke x. 18); *i.e.* fall from his exalted state of authority and power over the minds and hearts of men. "The god of this world" was hurled from the throne he had usurped; and God, who made the world, was proclaimed its only Lawgiver and its only King.

SECTION III.—IDIOM BY WHICH PERSONS ARE REPRESENTED AS DOING INTENTIONALLY WHAT THEY WERE ONLY THE OCCASION, UNDESIGNEDLY, OF DOING.

An illustration of this mode of expression is to be found in our Saviour's words, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. x. 34—36). These words, if understood as ordinary English, express the very opposite of the real design of our Lord's coming. He came to unite the whole human family in love to God, and in love one to another. At his birth the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will towards men." When He, the Prince of Peace, shall reign universally, the "nations shall beat their swords into plough-

shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, and shall learn war no more." Yet his coming did cause sons to rise up against their fathers, and daughters against their mothers. Whenever a member of a Jewish family professed himself a disciple of Christ, he soon experienced the fulfilment of his Master's words, "They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John xvi. 2). The *result* of our Lord's coming was, in all these cases, the very opposite of his intention; yet his words, if interpreted literally, declare that his *object* in coming was to produce variance and strife.

Another example of this phraseology occurs in the prophecy of Isaiah. God is represented as saying to him, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isa. vi. 10). This was said when the prophet beheld the glory of Christ, and spake of Him (John xii. 41). Bishop Lowth remarks, "The prophet speaks of the event, the fact as it would actually happen; not of God's purpose, and act by his ministry." God's purpose was merciful and gracious—to lead them to repentance. This purpose resisted, they became spiritually blind and deaf; their heart

was hardened ; and their “latter state was worse than the beginning” (see Acts xxviii. 25—27). A great principle of God’s moral government is here disclosed : if the goodness of God does not lead men to repentance, it leaves them in a more hardened and less hopeful condition, and thus enhances their punishment. The unprofitable servant not only has his talent taken away, but is also “cast into outer darkness” (Matt. xxv. 29, 30).

The knowledge of this Hebraism shows in what sense we are to understand the statement that “the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart.” God’s design was gracious and benevolent : it was to convince the King and his people that Jehovah was the one living and true God, and that all the idols of Egypt were powerless alike for good or for evil. The miracles wrought by Moses ought to have convinced both the Egyptians and their ruler of these essential truths. Had Pharaoh submitted to the evidence, he would have had to let the people of Israel go ; but this would have involved a sacrifice which he was not prepared to make. By closing his eyes to the truth, he hardened his own heart ; but God is said to have done this, because his gracious revelations to the monarch were the occasion of his heart being hardened. All the Egyptians did not thus imitate the obduracy of their sove-

reign ; for we read of those amongst the servants of Pharaoh "who feared the word of the Lord," and who, consequently, saved their cattle when the plague destroyed the herds of those who "regarded not the word of the Lord" (Exod. ix. 20, 21). "The mixed multitude" who went up with the Israelites out of Egypt was composed, probably, of those on whom the miracles of Moses and his teachings had made some impression, otherwise they would not have ventured to cross the Red Sea.

It is interesting and important to notice that the same principle of the Divine government is developed in God's dealing with the idolatrous Egyptians, and with the favoured Israelites. Light in different degrees was granted to both ; both closed their eyes, and both hardened their hearts. The goodness of God was, in each instance, the occasion of this deplorable result. If Egypt was destroyed for obduracy and unbelief, the people of God perished in the wilderness for the same sins : they could not enter into the promised land because of their unbelief and hardness of heart. The great truth we are taught is that the Ruler of the universe acts on the same principles towards all mankind. He has not one law for Egypt, and another for Israel. He is the God and Father of all ; and whilst He is "rich in mercy unto all that call upon Him," He is

invariably "righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." All may draw near to his throne of mercy; but all must feel that "a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of his kingdom" (Heb. i. 8).

SECTION IV.—PROPHETS ARE REPRESENTED AS ACTUALLY *doing* WHAT THEY MERELY *foretell* SHOULD COME TO PASS.

When Jeremiah was appointed to the prophetic office God said to him, "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy; and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jer. i. 10). His commission describes him as actually doing what he was only to foretell should be done. "This mode of speech is adopted in order more strikingly to express the certainty of the events predicted."—*Zwingle*.

To Ezekiel God says, "Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her and the daughters of the famous nations, into the nether parts of the earth, with them that go down into the pit" (Ezek. xxxii. 18). The command amounts only to this: "Prophecy that Egypt and other famous nations shall be cast down." So the same prophet in another place says, "When I came to destroy the city"

(xliii. 3); *i.e.* when I came to foretell that the city should be destroyed. Again, in chap. xxiii. 45, God says by Ezekiel, "The righteous men, they shall judge them;" referring, as Lowth says, to the judgments which God would inflict upon Samaria and Jerusalem, as predicted by Hosea, Amos, Jeremiah, &c.

In Hosea vi. 5 God says, "I have hewed them by my prophets." I have slain them by the words of my mouth; *i.e.* I have foretold that they should be hewed and slain.

Similar language is applied to the promises and to the denunciations of the false prophets, to whom God says, "Will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies?" (Ezek. xiii. 19.) These false prophets promised life to those who bribed them, and foretold death to God's faithful servants: their predictions are expressed as the slaying of the souls of the righteous, and saving the lives of the wicked, whereas they merely foretold falsely the doom of each.

SECTION V.—IDIOM BY WHICH A NEGATIVE IS
USED TO DECLARE AN EMPHATIC POSITIVE.

In Bishop Jebb's "Sacred Literature" we find, in a careful examination of Ps. xxi. 1, 2, an interesting illustration of this Hebrew idiom. The words are—

"O Jehovah, in thy strength the king shall rejoice;
And in thy salvation, how greatly shall he exult:
The desire of his heart thou hast granted him;
And the request of his lips thou hast not denied"
(Lowth's version).

The Bishop thus criticizes these lines:—"The gradation of member above member, and line above line, in each couplet of this stanza, is undeniable; 'salvation' is an advance upon 'strength;' and 'how greatly shall he exult,' an advance upon 'he shall rejoice:' again, 'the request of his lips' is something beyond 'the desire of his heart;' it is desire brought into act. The gradation in the last members of the last two lines may not be equally obvious, but it is by no means less certain: 'Thou hast granted, thou hast not denied;' the negative form is here much stronger than the positive, for it is a received canon of biblical philology that verbs of negation, or what amounts to the

same thing, adverbs of negation prefixed to verbs, have, in such cases, the force of expressing the opposite affirmative with peculiar emphasis: for example, 'The Lord *will not hold him guiltless* who taketh his name in vain;' that is, WILL ASSUREDLY HOLD HIM GUILTY (Exod. xx. 7). Again—

'And He blessed them, and they multiply greatly;
And their cattle He doth not diminish'
(Ps. cvii. 38);

that is, HE EXCEEDINGLY INCREASETH. On this principle is the above passage of Ps. xxi., '*Thou hast not denied:*' THOU HAST ASSUREDLY OR ABUNDANTLY GRANTED."—*Sacred Literature*, p. 36.

The knowledge of this idiom may give great emphasis to many scriptural expressions which would otherwise seem feeble. Thus, in Isa. lxxv. 12, God complains—

"Ye did evil before mine eyes,
And did choose that wherein I delighted not;"

i.e. they chose those things which the Holy One of Israel detested. This charge against them is repeated in the fourth verse of the following chapter.

In Jer. vii. 31 God complains thus of his people:—

“They have built the high places of Tophet,
Which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom,
To burn their sons and daughters in the fire,
Which I commanded not, neither came it into my
mind.”

Dr. Boothroyd renders the last line—

“Which I forbade, and altogether condemned;”

and says in a note, “From his own holy nature and his great mercy, it was impossible that God should command or in the least approve of human victims for sacrifice. *The sense is preferred to the idiom.*” In English ears the expressions are merely negative, and therefore feeble; but to Jewish ears they would express the greatest abhorrence.

In Jer. xix. 5 the same complaint is repeated in almost the same words. The fearful judgments denounced in consequence show that the righteous Judge regarded it as no merely negative evil, but one meriting the severest judgments.

The apostle Paul, in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians, says of the unbelieving Jews who opposed the Gospel, “*They please not God*, and are contrary to all men” (ii. 15). This expresses no negative displeasure on the part of God, but the deepest abhorrence, as is manifest from their unprecedented judgments: “The wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (ver. 16).

The uttermost wrath is the expression of the uttermost displeasure on the part of Him who judges righteously.

In contrast with the expression, "They please not God," may be placed that of One—the only one of the human family who could utter it—"I do always those things that please Him" (John viii. 29).

When Jeremiah says (Lam. iii. 34—36), "To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High, to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord *approveth not*," we are to understand that such conduct meets with the Lord's strongest disapprobation.

On the words of our Saviour, "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, He shall by no means lose his reward" (Matt. x. 42), Bishop Jebb remarks, "That is, according to a familiar idiom both of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures, HE SHALL MOST ASSUREDLY AND ABUNDANTLY OBTAIN IT."—*Sacred Literature*, p. 234.

So, too, where the apostle says, "He that believeth on Him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. ix. 33), we are to understand that all true believers shall have strong confidence: they

shall have "boldness in the day of judgment" (1 John iv. 17).

SECTION VI.—ERRORS REFERABLE TO MISINTERPRETING THE HEBREW IDIOM.

At the close of the preceding chapter we traced the popular notions respecting the destruction of the heavens and earth partly to the error of interpreting literally the symbolic language of the prophets. But this is not the sole source of misapprehension. Disregard of the peculiarities of the Hebrew idiom has been another source of error, so that symbols and idioms have combined to produce false impressions, and to originate false notions. In this section we shall dwell on the twofold influence of the Hebrew idiom and of Hebrew symbolism in their bearing on some important parts of Holy Scripture.

The belief that the earth and the heavens are doomed to utter destruction prevails almost universally in the Christian Church. Many regard it as an essential doctrine of our faith, and would denounce as heretics those who question whether such is the teaching of Holy Scripture. So prevalent and so unquestioned is this notion that our great poet has taken it for granted, and his words are familiarly quoted as if they were the "words of Holy Writ:"—

“The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.”

Such is the popular notion respecting the fate of our earth. It is also generally believed that the sun, the moon, and the stars are to be involved in the same fate, and to be “swept away with the besom of destruction.” Wesley makes it the subject of prayer:—

“Let those ponderous orbs descend,
And grind us into dust!”

How horrified would these people be were their petition granted. Truly we may say, “Ye know not what ye ask.”

If such is really the teaching of the inspired volume, it is our duty humbly and reverently to receive it; but if the popular notion is not based on revelation; if it is only a figment of the human brain, the result of false principles of interpreting Holy Scripture, we do not hesitate to say that a more improbable notion was never entertained. Progress and perfection, not decay and annihilation, is manifestly the law of the Divine government, both in the material and the spiritual world. We do not positively assert that this earth and the heavens above us will

never be destroyed ; but we do maintain that the Word of God, rightly interpreted, foretells no such destruction.

Many passages in the Bible speak of the perpetuity of the earth and the heavens. The following quotations from the Book of Psalms may give us some ideas concerning the purposes of the Infinite Creator :—

“ Who laid the foundations of the earth,
That it should not be removed *for ever* ”
(Ps. civ. 5).

“ And He built his sanctuary like high palaces,
Like the earth, which He hath established *for ever* ”
(Ps. lxxviii. 69).

Of “ the sun, the moon, and all the stars of light ” he says—

“ He hath also established them *for ever and ever* ;
He hath made a decree which shall not pass ”
(Ps. cxlviii. 6).

The promise concerning Messiah, the Son of David, is—

“ His seed shall endure *for ever* ;
And his throne as the sun before me.
It shall be established *for ever*, as the moon,
And as the faithful witness in heaven ”
(Ps. lxxxix. 36, 37).

By “ the faithful witness in heaven ” is meant the rainbow, “ the token of the everlasting

covenant between God and every living creature for perpetual generations." It was appointed as the pledge that "the waters should no more become a flood to destroy all flesh" (Gen. ix. 13). But if the earth, and all that it inherit, are, as some imagine, to be destroyed by fire instead of by water, the blessings of the Noahic covenant are of very questionable value.

Again, the psalmist declares that the homage to be paid to Messiah will be co-extensive with the duration of the sun and the moon:—

"They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure,
Throughout all generations" (Ps. lxxii. 5).

And in the seventeenth verse of the same Psalm—

"His name shall endure *for ever*;
His name shall be continued *as long as the sun*."

The peculiarity of the Hebrew parallelism should be noted here: "*for ever*" corresponds with "*as long as the sun*."

The words of Daniel, also, are peculiarly applicable and suggestive:—

"They that be wise shall shine
As the brightness of the firmament;
And they that turn many to righteousness
As the stars, *for ever and ever*" (Dan. xii. 3).

In these words the eternal glory of the saved

is described as commensurate with the eternal existence of the stars: both are to shine "*for ever and ever.*"

When the psalmist declared, "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains" (Ps. xxxvi. 6), he had no idea that these great mountains would ever depart: the aptness and grandeur of the comparison depend on the durability of the material object, as representing the eternity of God's righteousness. The psalmist, like the prophet, had in view "*the everlasting mountains and the perpetual hills*" (Hab. iii. 6), and both associated them with Him who changeth not, but whose "*ways are everlasting.*" So when the apostle would ascribe eternal praise to the Eternal Father, he uses this striking language: "Unto Him be glory in the Church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, *world without end.* Amen" (Eph. iii. 21).

Further, the unchangeableness of Him "*with whom there is no variableness*" is illustrated by the unchangeableness which marks the constitution of the material creation. When the Almighty would assure his people of the immutability of his counsel and the certainty of his word, He says—

"Thus saith Jehovah,
Who hath appointed the sun for a light by day,
The ordinances of the moon and stars for a light by
night,

Who maketh still the sea when its waves roar,
Jehovah of hosts is his name!

If these ordinances shall depart from before me,
Then shall the seed of Israel also cease
From being a nation before me for ever "

(Jer. xxxi. 35, 36).

This assurance implies that God's ordinances in the material creation are, like his promises, unchangeable and eternal. His promise in Isa. xlv. 17—

"Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an *everlasting* salvation :

Ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded, *world without end*"—

is very properly understood as an assurance that God's people shall never be ashamed or confounded ; but if our earth is to be destroyed, the salvation and blessedness promised are secured only so long as this world continues to exist. Note that "*world without end*" in the second line corresponds with "*everlasting*" in the first.

Yet it must be admitted that there are some statements in Scripture which, upon a superficial view, seem to sanction the popular belief that the earth and the heavens are to be destroyed. But statements which, *on a superficial view*, may appear to foretell such a result, may, on a careful examination, disclose to us a meaning widely

different. Errors respecting the destruction of the universe may be traced chiefly to two causes : first, to a disregard of the Hebrew idiom ; and, secondly, to interpreting literally language used symbolically. The former error is committed by those who understand by our Saviour's words, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," that the heavens and the earth will be destroyed ; whereas it has been shown that these words mean that sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than his word fail : this assertion, therefore, is a strong argument in favour of the perpetuity of the material heavens and earth. The latter error is committed by those who maintain that the stars will literally fall from heaven ; whereas the prediction is that certain rulers, symbolized by stars, should fall from their high estate.

We shall proceed to examine some portions of Holy Scripture which have been thus misinterpreted.

The Book of Isaiah contains a remarkable prophecy, respecting which it may be questioned whether the key to it is to be found in the symbolic interpretation, or in the Hebrew idiom, or in both :—

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
And look upon the earth beneath :

For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke,
And the earth shall wax old like a garment,
And they that dwell therein shall die in like
manner :

But my salvation shall be for ever,
And my righteousness shall not be abolished ”
(Isa. li. 6).

Bishop Porteus interprets symbolically the heavens and the earth here spoken of, and regards them as representing the ecclesiastical and civil constitution of the Assyrian empire, at that time the deadliest foe of the Jewish Church. —(*Porteus's Works*, vol. v. p. 215.) This interpretation might be supported by a subsequent verse in the same chapter, in which God, promising the restoration of his people from their captivity in Chaldea, employs the same imagery:—

“That I may plant the heavens,
And lay the foundations of the earth,
And say unto Zion,
Thou art my people ” (Isa. li. 16).

It has been shown, in a former chapter, that by the planting of the heavens is signified the restoration of the Jewish Church; and by laying the foundations of the earth is signified the re-establishment of their political constitution. By this deliverance and restoration God would, in

effect, say unto Zion, "Thou art my people." Previously, when threatening them with captivity and national dissolution, He had said, "Ye are not my people, and I will not be your God" (Hosea i. 9). By restoring and re-establishing the Hebrew Church and commonwealth, He reversed this sentence, and in effect declared, "Ye are my people."

This is an intelligible explanation of a difficult text, and in harmony with the principle of interpretation by which many portions of prophecy must be explained. But it may be questioned whether the peculiarity of the Hebrew idiom does not afford a more obvious and satisfactory explanation, according to which we are to understand the prophet as declaring, not that the heavens shall really vanish, or the earth literally wax old like a garment, but that sooner shall all creation be annihilated than God's salvation cease to exist, or his righteousness be abolished. No language could express more emphatically "the immutability of his counsel."

The words of the psalmist in Ps. cii., like those of the prophet, may have strengthened the popular notion respecting the annihilation of the material universe :—

"Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth ;
And the heavens are the work of thy hands.
They shall perish, but thou shalt endure ;

Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment ;
As a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall
be changed :

But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no
end " (Ps. cii. 25—27).

This may be interpreted, according to the Hebrew idiom, as an assertion that sooner shall the whole created universe perish than the Infinite Creator cease to exist. Instead of "*they shall* perish," some translators render the word, "*they may* perish " (see Boothroyd).

Several strong reasons, however, may be urged on behalf of a symbolic interpretation of these words. It is generally acknowledged that the writer of this Psalm was the prophet Daniel, and that it was composed by him shortly before the close of the Babylonian captivity. During his abode in Chaldea this distinguished man had been favoured with many visions and revelations concerning the rise and fall of the four great empires ; and it is observable that he speaks of one of them, symbolized by the "little horn," as "waxing great, even to the host of heaven ; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them " (Dan. viii. 10). Part of his visions were now on the verge of being realised. The Babylonian empire was approaching dissolution ; the empire of the Medes and Persians was now in the ascendant.

Cyrus was about to issue his famous decree, in virtue of which the captive Jews were to return to Jerusalem, to re-establish the Temple worship and their political status as a nation; thus fulfilling the promise of Jehovah to "plant the heavens, and to lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people" (Isa. li. 16).

But not only had Daniel been favoured with visions of the decay and dissolution of the four great empires; he had had vouchsafed to him the glorious vision of the introduction and establishment of Messiah's kingdom, "whose dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. vii. 14). He foresaw, also, the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven (chap. vii.); "the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place" (Matt. xxiv. 15); the consequent destruction of Jerusalem; and the dissolution of the ecclesiastical and civil establishments. With his mind engrossed by these glorious visions, and seeing that their fulfilment was about to commence in the destruction of Babylon by Cyrus, and that this fall of Babylon was only the first act of the great drama which was to close by the dissolution of all earthly governments founded on force, fraud, and cruelty, and the establishment of his king-

dom whose "sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness" (Heb. i. 8), and whose throne, consequently, "is for ever and ever," he adopts the language we have been considering—language which, understood as symbolical, declares that all unrighteous governments, whether ecclesiastical or civil, must be annihilated, and give place to Him who is the King of righteousness and the King of peace.

In the closing verse of this Psalm—

"The children of thy servants shall continue,
And their seed shall be established before thee"—

the psalmist appears to anticipate the speedy return of Israel to the promised land, and the restoration of their religious services. As this is subsequent to the heavens perishing and being changed as a vesture, the material heavens and earth cannot be referred to in the antecedent verses.

It may confirm the view taken of these words, "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth," if we notice that, in Scripture, civil governments are spoken of as "*the foundation*," and this with great propriety, as the security of the State rests upon its government, just as the security of a building rests on its foundation. Thus we read in Ps. xi., "If the *foundations* be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" And the response to this anxious inquiry is, "The

Lord is in his holy temple ; the Lord's *throne* is in heaven." Earthly governments may be destroyed ; but the throne of God is from everlasting to everlasting.

Again, in Ps. lxxxii., where the sacred writer so severely condemns unjust judges, he says, "All the *foundations* of the earth are out of course ;" and the painful conviction of their injustice prompts the sublime prayer—

"Arise, O God ! judge the earth ;
For thou shalt inherit all nations "

(Ps. lxxxii. 5, 8).

The sentiment expressed in these Psalms is closely analogous to that expressed in the closing verses of Ps. cii. The statement, "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth," harmonizes with the more literal statement of the apostle, "There is no power but of God ; the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. xiii. 1). If this is true of all governments, it was emphatically true of the Jewish ecclesiastical and civil constitution.

The apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, quotes the words of the psalmist, and applies them to our Lord : "And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands : they shall perish ; but thou remainest ;

and they all shall wax old as doth a garment: and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail" (Heb. i. 10—12). One main object in writing this Epistle was to prove to the Hebrew Christians that the Jewish civil and spiritual institutions were about to be abolished, in order that the glorious kingdom of Messiah (who, being a priest after the order of Melchizedec, combined in his own person the priestly with the regal office) might be substituted in their place. Towards the close of the Epistle he reminds them of the prophecy of Haggai, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven;" and urges those who receive the "kingdom which cannot be moved, to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. xii. 26—28). The "kingdom which cannot be moved" is identical with that spoken of by Daniel, "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. vii. 14).

A very remarkable coincidence is apparent in the writing of the psalmist and that of the apostle. Both are contemplating the establishment of the kingdom of Him who should "rule in righteousness," and the eventual abolition of all powers, whether secular or ecclesiastical,

which were opposed to his universal reign. Daniel had in immediate prospect the overthrow of the idolatrous and tyrannical empire of Babylon, the return of God's people to the Holy Land, and the restoration in the holy city of the worship of the one living and true God. St. Paul had in immediate view the second destruction of Jerusalem and the final abolition of the Temple worship, in order that the Christian Church, "the new Jerusalem," the true city of God, might be "established on the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills," that so "all nations might flow unto it" (Isa. ii. 1), that thus the prophecy might be fulfilled, "All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him" (Ps. lxxii. 11).

A careful examination of the apostle's words will demonstrate that the literal interpretation is untenable and absurd, and that the symbolical must be adopted. For *what* is to "be folded up as a vesture?" Our material earth, and the sun, a million times its size, with all the planets and their satellites composing our solar system, together with the Milky Way (of which our system forms a part), containing eighteen millions of stars, many larger than our own planet? How are these to be "folded up as a vesture, and to be *changed*?" Mark this expression: they are not to be destroyed or annihilated, but

to be CHANGED. The very term implies continued existence, whilst it also implies great alteration. As this change will be effected by the Infinite Creator, the presumption is that it will not be for the worse, but for the better, in accordance with what we know of the progressive character of the Divine government.

It may be urged that although the literal fulfilment of this prophecy is untenable, it may be interpreted figuratively, and that, as Isaiah sublimely says of the Infinite Creator, "Who stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in," (Isa. xl. 22), it does not seem forced and unnatural to speak thus of their destruction: "As a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed." This is admitted; but figurative language, like symbolic language, if interpreted literally, inevitably leads to false conclusions. To attempt to maintain as scriptural truth the notion that the heavens and earth are to be destroyed, when this notion is derived from a literal interpretation of figurative language, is the height of absurdity. The time will come when the Church will wonder that such belief in universal destruction was ever entertained.

Abandoning then, as untenable and preposterous, the literal interpretation of these words, and adopting the symbolical meaning as the only

one at all rational, we discern their force and propriety. All earthly governments (symbolized in Scripture by the heavens and the earth), whether ecclesiastical or secular, if founded on force, falsehood, and unrighteousness, contain within them the elements of decay and dissolution. They become like worn-out garments, no longer capable of affording protection, and consequently fit only to be "folded up and to be changed." This transition process has been going on for more than eighteen hundred years. It was initiated when John the Baptist exhorted men to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And wherever the kingdom of Christ, who sitteth upon the throne of his holiness, is established, all these decaying institutions, such as those of Babylon in Daniel's time, and of Jerusalem and of Rome in the apostles', must give place, must be folded up like a worn-out garment, and changed for that government which has in it no element of decay or dissolution. Truth cannot decay; righteousness cannot decay; love cannot decay. Earthly thrones, based on contrary principles, must totter and fall. But "thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." Why? Because "thy sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness" (Heb. i. 8).

As the mists of popular misapprehension pass away, the glorious truth, veiled in the symbolic

language of the prophet and the apostle, appears revealed to our mental vision. The throne of God, founded on "righteousness and judgment" (Ps. xcvii. 2), rises to our view, and we hear the voice of "Him who sits upon the throne" declaring to all mankind that truth, righteousness, and goodness are the essential conditions of all permanent prosperity. This Divine law, as it is eternal, is also universal. "In righteousness shalt thou be established" is the grand truth which alone can secure the well-being of any individual, of any family, of any commercial firm, of any society, of any secular government, and of any Church. Falsehood, fraud, and injustice will ever prove, what they essentially are, the elements of decay and of dissolution. To secure perpetuity, the throne of human authority, like the throne of God, must have justice and judgment for its foundation. To whatever is built on any other basis the words of the apostle are applicable, "They shall perish . . . they all shall wax old as doth a garment: and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed."

We conclude, therefore, that the Bible is not chargeable with the extravagant notion that the material universe is to be destroyed. The cause of truth suffers seriously by asserting such fictions to be the teaching of revelation. Intelligent and scientific men too often adopt these

popular notions, and regard them as scriptural assertions. They cannot reconcile the manifest principles of the Divine government of the world with what they imagine to be asserted in the Word of God. Were they to investigate every alleged truth of revelation as carefully as they would any announced discovery in science, their scepticism would probably give way to an intelligent and well-founded belief.

In Ps. civ., in which the inspired author celebrates the majesty of God as displayed in the creation, he says—

“The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever ;
The Lord shall rejoice in his works” (Ps. civ. 31).

Can we imagine that this source of joy to the Infinite Mind shall ever be cut off, and, instead of a universe “full of his glory,” in which “all his works praise him,” nothing shall remain on which the eye of Deity can gaze but “a universal blank of Nature’s works?” The Bible tells us, “He hath made his wonderful works to be *remembered*” (Ps. cxi. 4), not to be destroyed.

Let the reader weigh carefully the following words of a very profound thinker :—“God’s fires are not for the ruin of the earth, which is the work of his hands, but for the ruin of those who have defiled it with the works of their hands.”—*Maurice on the Apocalypse*, p. 280.



CHAPTER VI.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE—DARK SAYINGS—PROVERBS AND PARABLES—HYPERBOLE.

"The Bible is more read, but it is also more misread, than any other book."—The *Times* on the "History and Literature of the Israelites."

IT cannot be denied that this assertion of our leading journal is painfully true. One chief cause of the Bible being so frequently *misread* may be referred to the fact of the figurative language with which it abounds being so little understood. To understand it fully close and persevering study is necessary. The object of the present chapter is to familiarise the Scripture student with the dark sayings and figurative language of the Bible, so that the Word of God may be as well understood as it is extensively read.

All Oriental nations delight in highly figurative language, and use metaphors which, to Western ears, seem extravagant. Calmet, in his "Bible Dictionary," says, "The parabolical,

enigmatical, figurative, and sententious way of speaking was the language of the Eastern sages and learned men; and nothing was more insupportable than to hear a fool utter parables: ‘*The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a parable in the mouth of fools*’” (Prov. xxvi. 7); that is, “as it is uncomely and ridiculous to see a lame man dancing, no less absurd and indecent are wise and pious speeches from a foolish and ungodly man, whose actions grossly contradict them, whereby he makes them contemptible and himself ridiculous.”—*Cruden*.

In their attachment to metaphorical language the Jews were intensely Oriental. Jerome observes that this manner of instructing and speaking by similitudes and parables was common in Syria, and especially in Palestine. “The Jewish books,” says Dr. Lightfoot, “abound everywhere with these figures; the nation inclining, by a kind of natural genius, to this kind of rhetoric. One might not amiss call their religion parabolical, folded up within the covering of ceremonies; and their oratory was like to it.”—*Works*, vol. ii. p. 204.

In illustration of their peculiar mode of speech, the same learned divine quotes from the Talmud:—“Rabbi Joshua asked a boy, ‘Which is the shortest way to the city?’ The boy answered, ‘This is the shortest way, though it is

the longest; and that is the longest way, though it is the shortest.' Rabbi Joshua took that way which was the shortest, though the longest. When he came very near the city he found gardens and places of pleasure hedged in, so that he could go no farther. He returned, therefore, to the boy, and said to him, 'My son, is this the shortest way to the city?' The boy answered, 'Art thou a wise man in Israel? Did I not thus say to thee, "That is the shortest way, though the longest?"' &c. (vol. xii. p. 257). The boy evidently assumed that a wise man or master in Israel would have understood his enigmatical directions.

Several passages of Scripture may be quoted to prove how much addicted the Israelites were to parables and dark sayings, or enigmas. The psalmist says—

"I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old"

(Ps. lxxviii. 2).

And again, in Ps. xlix. 4—

"I will incline mine ear to a parable;
I will open my dark saying upon the harp."

One avowed object of Solomon in writing the Book of Proverbs was to assist his scholars

“To understand a proverb, and the interpretation ;
The words of the wise, and their dark sayings ”
(Prov. i. 6).

As the sacred Scriptures were addressed by Israelites to Israelites, it was natural that the truths recorded or revealed should be expressed in the phraseology and style most familiar and most interesting to the Israelitish people. Accordingly, we find that the Bible abounds in highly figurative language, which not unfrequently appears to us extravagant, although it was the mode of speech most easily understood by those to whom it was originally addressed. Unless this be kept steadily in mind, the Scripture student will misinterpret many portions of God's Word. The Jewish mind, the Jewish modes of thought, and the Jewish modes of expression differ widely from those prevalent among the Anglo-Saxon race. The former were imaginative and impulsive; the latter are practical, and too often phlegmatic.

SECTION I.—DARK SAYINGS.

In Eccles. xii. 1—7 the royal preacher has chosen a great variety of enigmatical terms to describe the pitiful condition of old age in its helplessness and imbecility. These dark sayings are intensely dark—like that darkness which plagued

the Egyptians, "a darkness that might be felt." Perhaps no portion of Scripture has so perplexed modern interpreters; and, after all, their interpretations are merely conjectural, and far from satisfactory. A glance at some of them will show that the resemblance between the thing signified and the metaphor chosen is, in many cases, very remote; and however beautiful the description may be as an Oriental production, no English author would think of emulating the style.

By "*the keepers of the house*" the sacred penman describes the hands and the arms, which in old age "*tremble*;" and by "*the strong men*" he represents the legs, which "*bow themselves*." "The grinders" are the teeth, which "*fail because they are few*," whilst "*those that look out at the windows*" mean the eyes, which "*are darkened*." "*The doors shut in the street*" indicate the lips, necessarily closed by the loss of the teeth, which causes "*the sound of the grinding to be low*." The hoary head is depicted by the "*flourishing of the almond-tree*," whose blossoms are white and very abundant. "*The silver cord*" is generally thought to figure the spinal marrow; "*the golden bowl*" the skull, which contains the brain; "*the pitcher broken at the fountain*" indicates that the functions of the heart have ceased; and "*the wheel broken at the cistern*" the action

of the lungs being at an end. Here is a collection of "dark sayings" of Hebrew origin sufficient to puzzle any English reader; and if, as Bishop Lowth says, "by this enigmatical composition Solomon, after the manner of the Oriental sages, meant to put to trial the acuteness of his readers," all must acknowledge that he has been eminently successful (see "Lowth's Lectures," vol. i. p. 219).

It is worthy of note that one great object of the Queen of Sheba in visiting Solomon was not only to hear his wisdom, but also "to prove him with hard questions" (1 Kings x. 1). Josephus states that she "proposed questions of very great difficulty, and entreated that he would solve their hidden meaning." The same historian records that Solomon sent riddles to Hiram, King of Tyre, and desired to receive the like from him.—(*Antiquities*, vol. ii. p. 30.) "This statement of Josephus furnishes a good illustration of the character which was in those early times given to the intercourse of minds, and which it has not yet ceased to bear in the East. The Scripture does not condescend to preserve any such 'hard questions,' except in the case of Samson, where the connection of the history required its introduction (Judges xiv. 14). Those now mentioned (by the queen) were probably of a similar character; or perhaps like the

famous riddle which Œdipus solved, the question being, 'What animal is that which goes upon four feet in the morning, upon two at noon, and upon three in the evening?' the answer being, 'Man; who in infancy goes on all fours, walks erect in manhood, and in age requires the aid of a staff.'—*Pictorial Bible*, Kings x. 1.

In the apocryphal Book of Esdras we find a very interesting illustration of the Oriental custom of cherishing "the words of the wise, and their dark sayings." Three young men belonging to the body-guard of King Darius thus agree:—"Let every one of us speak a sentence: he that shall overcome, and whose sentence shall seem wiser than the others, to him shall the King Darius give great gifts, and great things in token of victory." (This commercial improvement of their wisdom is noticeable—one of the three, we know, was a son of Jacob; probably the other two were also.) Each writes his sentence. That of the first is, "Wine is the strongest;" that of the second is, "The King is strongest;" that of the third, "Women are strongest; but, above all things, Truth beareth away the victory." These sententious sayings are submitted to the King, who resolves on a public discussion. He "calls all the princes of Persia and Media, and the governors, and the captains, and the lieutenants, and the chief officers; he sits on the

royal seat of judgment, and the writings are read before them all." In presence of the august assembly the literary tournament is commenced. The three champions enter the lists. Each in order defends his own statement, and each displays great acuteness and skill. But when the third hero, who was "valiant for the truth," had finished his argument by exclaiming, "Blessed be the God of truth!" all the people shouted and said, Great is Truth, and mighty above all things!" (1 Esdras iii. iv.) The victory was awarded to the champion of Truth, and more than the stipulated prize granted. Zorobabel used wisely what he had gained, and employed his wealth and his influence with King Darius in promoting the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of Jerusalem.

Stress is laid upon this incident, as showing, with others, the custom of the Eastern people to exercise themselves in dark sayings and sententious speeches—a custom which ought to be kept in mind by all who desire clearly to discern and fully to comprehend the facts recorded and the truths revealed in Holy Scripture. The Book of Daniel furnishes us with two very expressive illustrations of Oriental attachment to "dark sayings," and of the importance with which those were regarded who could understand and explain them. When Belshazzar, at his

impious feast, beheld the fingers of a man's hand writing mysterious letters on the wall opposite to which the King sat—when the cup of unhallowed joy was dashed from his lips, and “the cup of trembling” put into his hand—the queen-mother (Nitocris) came into the banqueting-house, in order to commend to the affrighted monarch Daniel as able to read the writing, and she spoke of him as one possessing an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and *showing of hard sentences*,” &c. (Dan. v. 12).

In Dan. viii. 23 the angel, describing to the prophet one of the fiercest enemies of the Jews, probably the Roman power, speaks of him as “a king of fierce countenance, and *understanding dark sentences*.” Dr. A. Clarke thus comments on these words:—“Very learned and skilful in all things relating to government and its intrigues.” These two examples afford very significant illustrations of the importance attached by Eastern nations to *dark sayings*. Were an English teacher to adopt such a style, he would be looked upon as demented.

One of the earliest enigmatical sayings recorded in the Gospel is found in John i. 51: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”

Dr. Whitby thus comments on these words :—
“Christ here seems to allude to Jacob’s ladder, of which we read Gen. xxviii. 12, 13, on the top of which was the Divine Majesty, and the angels ascending (saith Maimonides) to receive his commands, and descending to execute them. Christ, therefore, by these words seems to inform them that the miracles which they should see performed by Him should declare the Divine Majesty present with Him, and giving Him those commands He was to execute by his prophetic office, as clearly as if they had seen the angels of God ascending and descending on Him.”

All this, no doubt, is intimated in the words of our Lord; but something more important and more instructive still is concealed in this *dark saying*. Two great objects were contemplated by the vision vouchsafed to Jacob: one was to confirm his faith in God’s providence; the other was to renew the covenant made with Abraham. When wandering in search of a home, “a Syrian ready to perish,” the God of Abraham appeared to Jacob in vision, and renewed the glorious promise, “In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (ver. 14). This promised Seed was now on earth, and had commenced his ministry—that ministry by which “all the families of the earth

should be blessed." He had been recognised by Nathanael, who exclaimed, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God: thou art the King of Israel!" (John i. 49.) It was to this disciple, "an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile," that our Lord addressed the *dark saying* here recorded.

By the appearance of the Son of God in human flesh, to be the Mediator between God and man, the intercourse between heaven and earth, broken off by the sin of Adam, was mercifully restored. Through Him, our great High Priest, every penitent sinner can have access to God as his Father. By the sin of the first Adam man was excluded from Eden and from heaven, of which Eden was the type. He was banished "from the presence of the Lord." By the obedience of the Second Adam the way of access to God is made plain; He is himself "*the way*." All believers may now say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ." The intercourse between earth and heaven is thus restored by Him who united in his own person the human with the Divine. It had been typified by Jacob's vision of angels ascending and descending the ladder which reached from earth to heaven. This and all other spiritual blessings are the fruit of that new covenant of which Christ is the Mediator,

made first with Abraham, confirmed in vision to Jacob, and sealed with the blood of Emmanuel.

Thus we find that our Lord adapted his mode of teaching to the peculiar customs and tastes of the nation He came to instruct. Had He appeared first amongst the Greeks or the Romans, although the great truths He came to reveal would have been precisely the same, the whole style and character of the Gospels would have been widely different. It should be kept in mind that for about two thousand years (*i.e.* from the call of Abraham) God had been instructing his people, and preparing them for the coming of "the Great Deliverer," who should "take upon Him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. ii. 16), and should proclaim the everlasting Gospel, first to his chosen people, and then to the Gentile world. As introductory to this great event, a ritual of great precision was ordained, the design of which was to teach great spiritual truths through the medium of ceremonies and emblems. Prophets and wise men were raised at suitable intervals. Many of these, prompted by "the Spirit of Christ which was in them," committed to writing the truths they were inspired to utter. These sacred writings were read in the synagogues every Sabbath, and usually twice in the week; thus their peculiar

style became familiar to Jewish ears, and was at once the most popular and the most easy to be understood. It was only natural, therefore, that our Lord should adopt this style when He preached to the multitude the glad tidings of his salvation.

Many "dark sayings" are, therefore, found in the discourses and in the recorded conversations of our Lord. Some of these were not understood, even by the apostles themselves, at the time they were uttered. St. John records a remarkable instance of their misapprehension very early in the Saviour's ministry. When He drove out those who bought and sold in the Temple, the Jews demanded of Him, "What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" In reply, "Jesus said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They exclaim in astonishment, "Forty and six years was this Temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But He spake of the temple of his body." "These things understood not the disciples at the first," for they had no idea that the Messiah would either die or rise again; but "when He was risen from the dead, they remembered that He had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said" (John ii. 18—22).

In the record of his discourse with Nicodemus, enforcing the necessity of our being born again in order to our entering into the kingdom of God, the astonished inquirer exclaims, "How can these things be?" To which our Lord replies, "Art thou a master" (*i.e.* teacher) "of Israel, and knowest not these things?" And then He adds (still in figurative language), "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" By "earthly things" we are to understand the elementary truths of religion, such as the necessity of our being born again; by "heavenly things" we are to understand "the deep things of God, which are revealed to us by his Spirit" (1 Cor. ii. 10). These are as high above the elementary truths of the Gospel "as the heavens are high above the earth."

"Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep," was the reply of the woman of Samaria when the Saviour spoke to her of the "living water" which He was ready to give. The skill of the Great Teacher was manifested by the means He adopted to rivet her attention and excite her inquiries. Had He merely stated the plain truth He wished to enforce, she would probably have paid it little or no attention. So soon as an interest was awakened in her mind, he proceeded to probe her conscience and to discover

the secrets of her heart. The result is well known (John iv.).

This enigmatical style of teaching, so prominent in our Lord's discourses, is strikingly exemplified in John vi., in which He declares, "I am the bread of life." Through not understanding the modes of speech so prevalent amongst Jewish teachers, the true meaning of our Saviour's words has by many been greatly misapprehended.

In order clearly to understand our Lord's discourse, the occasion on which it was delivered, and the antecedent circumstances, must be carefully examined. The Saviour had performed the miracle of feeding about five thousand men with five barley loaves and two small fishes. Struck with this display of power and benevolence, the multitude recognised his Messiahship, and exclaimed, "This is of a truth that Prophet which should come into the world." Perceiving that they would come by force to make Him a King, our Lord crossed over the Sea of Tiberias, and landed at Capernaum. On the next day the people followed Him; but "He who searcheth the heart" knew perfectly the motives by which they were prompted. Accordingly, He told them, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled;" and He exhorted them to

“labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” The multitude, intent only on gratifying their animal appetites, failed to discern the spiritual meaning of our Lord. Their carnal notions of the Messiah, who they expected would supply them with all sensual gratifications, blinded their eyes so that they could not receive his truth. They asked for a sign, such as that of Moses, who “gave them bread from heaven to eat.” The Saviour replied that He “was the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who cometh down from heaven, and giveth life” (*i.e.* spiritual life) “unto the world.” The Jews then murmured at Him because He said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven;” just as their forefathers in the wilderness murmured against Moses, and said of the provision God had sent them, “Our soul loatheth this light bread” (Num. xxi. 5). Had the Jews at Capernaum, instead of murmuring, imitated the example of Nicodemus, and asked for an explanation of what they could not understand, no doubt they would, like him, have received the necessary instruction. But instead of this, when they saw no prospect of being supplied with the only food they craved for, they murmured, and said contemptuously, “Is not this Jesus, the Son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" From this time our Lord's discourse becomes more enigmatical, and to them more incomprehensible.

Here we see illustrated an important principle of the Divine government, "*To him that hath, more shall be given*" (as in the case of Nicodemus, who, "receiving meekly the engrafted word," was more fully instructed in the truth); "*but from him that hath not shall be taken away that which he hath*" (as in the case of these Jews, who murmured at the words of Him who "spake as never man spake"). So when the disciples asked their Master, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" he replied, "Because it is given to *you*" (*i.e.* to you who are my disciples, humble learners of me) "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. . . . Therefore speak I to them in parables; because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matt. xiii. 10—13).

As they came to the Lord with a fleshly appetite, a murmuring disposition, and an unbelieving heart, the teaching of the Master becomes, as he proceeds, more intensely figurative and more difficult to comprehend. He tells them, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." Un-

derstanding his words literally, many even of his disciples exclaimed, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" Our Lord then gives the true key to his metaphorical discourse: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." It is surprising that many Christians, like these carnal Jews, think more of "the flesh which profiteth nothing" than of "the spirit which quickeneth."

Had the Jews understood their own Scriptures, they would have had no difficulty in understanding the teaching of Christ. Knowledge, truth, and doctrine are the food of the mind, and as necessary to its well-being as bread, flesh, and fruit are to the health of the body. Accordingly, the substances which nourish the body are aptly chosen as metaphors of that which nourishes and invigorates the spirit. Very beautifully does Solomon set this forth:—

"Wisdom hath builded her house,
She hath hewn out her seven pillars:
She hath killed her beasts, she hath mingled her
wine,
She hath also furnished her table.
She hath sent forth her maidens;
She crieth upon the highest places of the city,
Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither;
To him that wanteth understanding, she saith,
Come, eat of my bread,

And drink of the wine which I have mingled,
Forsake the foolish and live;
And go in the way of understanding ”

(Prov. ix. 1—6).

The first five couplets are metaphorical ; the last couplet expresses the plain truth which the sacred penman would by these metaphors enforce.

The merciful provision made in the Gospel for the spiritual wants of men is set forth in similar metaphors by the prophet Isaiah :—

“ And Jehovah God of hosts shall make,
For all the peoples, in this mountain,
A feast of delicacies, a feast of old wines :
Of delicacies exquisitely rich, of old wines perfectly
refined ” (Isa. xxv. 6, Lowth’s version).

By such figures the most valuable provisions supplied for the body set forth the provision God has made for man’s spiritual wants (compare Isa. lv. 1—5).

The mass of the Jews interpreted these prophecies literally, and accordingly they looked for a Messiah who should gratify their carnal appetites. Hence, whilst the few who were divinely enlightened beheld in Him “ the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” He was, to the great majority, “ as a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness, and without beauty that they should desire him ” (Isa. liii. 2).

Human nature is the same in every age; it clings to that which is material, rather than to that which is spiritual—to that which is seen, rather than to that which is unseen. Hence many in the present day interpret literally the words of our Lord, “Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you.” They do not rise to the spiritual discernment of our Lord’s discourse, as Peter did when he exclaimed, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast *the words of eternal life*” (John vi. 68).

Dr. Lightfoot pointedly remarks, “To partake of the Messiah truly, is to partake of himself, of his pure nature, his righteousness, his spirit; and to live and grow, and to receive nourishment from that participation of Him. Things which the Jewish schools heard little of, did not believe, did not think; but things which our blessed Saviour expresseth lively and comprehensively enough by that of eating his flesh and drinking his blood.”—*Heb. and Tal. Ex.*, vol. xii. p. 297.

The comment of Mr. Cruden throws light on these *dark sayings*:—“In John vi. 53—56 our Saviour says, ‘*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*’ Except ye partake of those benefits which I purchased by my sufferings in my human nature, ye have no spiritual life, no communion with

God, but continue in your sins, and shall not partake of eternal life. Again, '*He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.*' There is an intimate union and communion between us, he having a constant dependence upon me for life, which is his dwelling in me, and I giving out a constant influence and quickening virtue to make him live, which is my dwelling in him."—*Concordance*.

To show how familiar this figurative language was to the Jews, reference may be made to the words of Jeremiah, "Thy words were found, and I did *eat* them," &c. (xv. 16). Ezekiel, also, was in vision commanded by God to *eat* the roll of parchment in which were "written, within and without, lamentations, and mourning, and woe" (Ezek. iii. 1—3). This intimated that he was to receive *inwardly* all the truths God enjoined him to proclaim to his people, and then to announce them. So, too, the writer of the Apocalypse records that he "took the little book, or scroll, out of the angel's hand, and *ate* it up;" and adds, "it was in my mouth as sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was embittered" (Rev. x. 10).

Our Lord's discourse to the woman of Samaria, and his discourse to the Jews at Capernaum, contain many points of resemblance. It may be said that in one case his text was "Water," in

the other "Bread." The woman came to the well to draw water, and the Divine Teacher improved the occasion to direct her thoughts to that "living water" which He only could give, and concerning which He said, "Whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John iv. 14). The Jews at Capernaum came to Jesus, hoping to be supplied with bread, as Moses had supplied Israel with manna in the wilderness. The Divine Teacher sought to raise their minds above "the meat* which perisheth," and to fix them on "that meat which endureth unto everlasting life," &c. (John vi. 27), and He declares to them, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (ver. 35). By these words, the lesson which the Saviour had taught the woman of Samaria He sought to impress on his unteachable and querulous audience at Capernaum. If "the water" is to be interpreted spiritually, then, by every sound principle of interpretation, "the meat, the bread, the flesh, and the blood" must likewise be interpreted spiritually.

* The word "meat" is used to signify provisions of any sort for bodily nourishment.—*Cruden*.

The results of these two enigmatical discourses from the lips of the same Divine Teacher are remarkable. The guilty and degraded creature who had "had five husbands" was convinced of her own guilt, and of the fact that her reprover was "the Christ," and she immediately made Him known to the men of the city, that they might hear his words. We read that "many believed for the saying of the woman, who testified, He told me all that ever I did;" but, it is added, "many more believed because of his own word, and said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John iv. 39—42). Thus, whilst the astonishing miracle of feeding five thousand men with five barley loaves failed to convince the Jews, the testimony of a notorious sinner recently converted, and the words of the Lord Jesus, spoken by himself in the ears of these despised Samaritans, sufficed to convince them that He was "the Saviour of the world." This may account for the fact that when Philip subsequently went to Samaria and "preached Christ unto them, the people with one accord gave heed to those things which he spake; and there was great joy in that city" (Acts viii. 5—8).

We shall now proceed to examine the words of our Lord addressed to St. Peter—

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven ” (Matt. xvi. 19).

These enigmatical words were addressed by our Lord to St. Peter when, in answer to the question, “But whom say ye that I am ?” the apostle declared emphatically, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” On hearing this declaration, our Lord said, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona ; for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Widely different interpretations are given of these words. Some eminent divines (among them Drs. Whitby and Samuel Clarke) consider that the apostle himself is the “rock ” on which Christ declared his Church should be built ; others maintain that the great truth avowed by the apostle, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” is the sure foundation of his spiritual temple. This latter view is more in harmony with other Scripture statements. St. Peter himself declared to the Jewish rulers, concerning Christ, “This is the stone which was

set at nought of you builders, which is become the head-stone of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 7—12). In his First Epistle he emphatically declares the same truth, quoting the words of Isaiah, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded" (1 Peter ii. 6). The apostle never spoke of himself as the rock on which the Church was built, but invariably proclaimed to the Jews, as the only foundation, that great truth which he had avowed in the day of his Lord's humiliation, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." To the Gentile congregation assembled in the house of Cornelius he preached the same fundamental truths, though not in Jewish phraseology, declaring the crucifixion of Christ, his resurrection, his appointment by God to be the Judge of quick and dead; and he closed by saying, "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts x. 43)—words equivalent to "he that believeth in Him shall not be confounded."

When the apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says, "Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ him-

self being the chief corner-stone" (ii. 20), we are to understand him as speaking, not of their persons, but of their doctrines and teachings. So, too, when, writing to another Church, he says, "When *Moses is read*, the veil is upon their heart" (2 Cor. iii. 15), he can mean only the *writings* of their great prophet and lawgiver.

It was consequent on this avowal of his faith, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," that our Lord uttered the memorable words whose meaning we shall endeavour to ascertain. Having pronounced Peter "blessed" for having had this knowledge revealed to him by the Father, He invests him with a twofold power: the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed to him; and, in addition to this, he is assured that "whatsoever he shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven."

The first part of our Lord's promise applies to St. Peter exclusively: to him alone were committed "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." The second promise, investing him with the power of binding and loosing, was subsequently conferred on all the apostles in common with him (Matt. xviii. 18).

We must first inquire what is the precise meaning of the phrase, "the kingdom of heaven;" and then what peculiar power was on this occasion conferred on him to whom the keys of the

kingdom were committed. By the kingdom of heaven the Jews understood Messiah's kingdom on earth. John the Baptist, who came to "prepare the way of the Lord," commenced his ministry by preaching, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iii. 2). This expression is used by St. Matthew only; all the other evangelists write "the kingdom of God:" the apostles, also, do the same, sometimes speaking of it as "the kingdom of Christ." All these varied expressions are synonymous. Men become the subjects of this kingdom when they believe the Gospel, and bow in subjection to the King who reigns in righteousness. All men naturally are the subjects of Satan's kingdom, and it is only by the preaching of the Gospel that they can be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts xxii. 18). St. Peter exercised the power with which he had been invested on two special occasions: first at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, when he preached the Gospel of the kingdom to the Jews, and three thousand souls were added to the Church—*i.e.*, in Jewish phraseology, "entered into the kingdom of heaven;" and again at Cæsarea, when he preached to Cornelius and his friends words whereby," as the apostle said, "thou and all thy house shall be saved" (Acts xi. 14). By thus preaching the Gospel he "opened the door

of faith " (Acts xiv. 27) first to the Jews, and next to the Gentiles; and this was the exercise of the power delegated to him by the Lord when He said, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

The action of the apostle on this occasion contrasts strikingly with the conduct of those teachers of the law whom our Lord so severely condemns: "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye enter not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered" (Luke xi. 52); also to that of the scribes and Pharisees, to whom He said, "Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Matt. xxiii. 13). It was through making the Word of God of none effect by their traditions (Mark vii. 13) that these doctors of the law, and scribes and Pharisees, "shut up the kingdom of heaven" to those who were entering; and it was by preaching the Gospel of Christ, the truth of God, that St. Peter opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, both Jews and Gentiles.

The additional power conferred at this time on St. Peter, and subsequently on all the apostles, was the power of binding and of loosing. These terms, as Lightfoot shows, were very commonly

used by the Jews ; and our Lord, according to his custom, chose the expressions with which they were most familiar. They evidently apply, not to *persons*, but to *things* ; for our Lord does not say *whomsoever*, but “*whatsoever*, thou shalt bind,” &c. The phrase, “to bind and to loose,” in their vulgar speech, meant to prohibit and to permit, or to teach what is prohibited or permitted—what lawful, what unlawful.—(*Lightfoot*, vol. iii. p. 99.) In the fifteenth chapter of the Acts we have an interesting account of the exercise of this apostolic authority. Some Jewish believers, having taught the Gentile converts at Antioch, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved,” Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to go to Jerusalem in order to confer “with the apostles and elders about this question.” The result of their conference was that they “*loosed*” circumcision and other Mosaic rites ; and they “*bound*” them to “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled,* and from fornication.” In effect, they *loosed* their converts, not only from the yoke of the Mosaic law, which neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear, but also from the “heavy burdens, grievous to be borne,” laid on them by the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. xxiii.), and they

* This, probably, was in deference to Jewish prejudices.

directed all who were “weary and heavy laden” with this ceremonial religion voluntarily to take on them the yoke of the Divine Master, and, instead of seeking peace by rites and ceremonies and human contrivances, to learn of Him who is meek and lowly in heart, and so find rest unto their souls, and prove, by happy experience, the truth of his words, “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. xi. 28—30). A great lesson this—the great lesson—for all Christian teachers.*

SECTION II.—PROVERBS AND PARABLES.

“A parable,” says Mr. Cruden, “is a similitude taken from natural things, to instruct us in the knowledge of things spiritual.”—(*Concordance*.) Bishop Lowth defines it as “that kind of allegory which consists of a continued narration of a fictitious or accommodated event, applied to the illustration of some important truth.” It differs from the proverb; for this is essentially concise, whilst the parable is continuous and varied. When Solomon says—

“He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand ;
But the hand of the diligent maketh rich”
(Prov. x. 4),

* The reader may find this subject more fully treated in a small pamphlet, “Confession and Absolution,” by the Author.

he utters simply a proverb, short and sententious. But he utters a parable when he says—

“I went by the field of the slothful,
And by the vineyard of the man void of understanding;
And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns,
Nettles had covered the face thereof,
And the stone wall thereof was broken down.
Then I saw, and considered it well:
I looked upon it, and received instruction.
Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to sleep:
So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth;
And thy want as an armed man”

(Prov. xxiv. 30—34).

The proverb is more concisely expressed, and more easily retained; the parable is more picturesque and impressive. Both are very frequent in the Old Testament; parables predominate in the New.

Abraham appears to have originated the most ancient proverb on record, and one not only the most ancient, but also the most instructive and encouraging ever uttered—one which will live so long as the Church militant exists. The occasion was when, on Mount Moriah, God provided a ram to be offered instead of the patriarch's son. We read, “And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah Jireh” (Jehovah will provide): “as it is said to this day, IN THE MOUNT JEHOVAH WILL

PROVIDE " (Gen. xxii. 14). It was, perhaps, in a prophetic spirit that the patriarch had said, in answer to Isaac's touching inquiry, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" "My son, God will provide a lamb for a burnt offering" (ver. 8). God did provide. "In the mount," at the critical place, and at the critical moment, the God of Abraham interposed; and the grand truth expressed in this patriarchal proverb was "graven as with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever" (Job xix. 24), in order that all the spiritual children of Abraham, throughout all ages, might learn to exercise their father's faith, and enjoy his blessedness.

The venerable antiquity of this proverb, and the circumstances which originated it, deepen our interest in the great truth it embodies. Nothing more perfect can be imagined: it is a model proverb, very concise, but wonderfully comprehensive, expressing in few words one of the cardinal truths on which frail man can rest his hope.

The most ancient parable on record is that of Jotham, recorded Judges ix. 8—15. Fully to appreciate it we must in imagination endeavour to realise the time, the place, and the circumstances under which it was uttered. Gideon, a man of great ability, and who had been employed by God to deliver his people from the

tyranny of the Midianites, and also to check Israel's idolatry, after having governed the nation for many years, "died in a good old age." He left seventy sons, one of whom, Abimelech, was the offspring of a concubine. Ambitious to succeed his father in the government, he devised the barbarous plan of murdering all his brethren. These were all cruelly beheaded on one stone, with the exception of Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, who by hiding himself managed to escape. The day arrived for proclaiming Abimelech king. His partisans assemble for this purpose in the plain of Schechem. The coronation ceremonies are interrupted by a voice proceeding from a mountain which overlooked the plain. Jotham had climbed to the top of Mount Gerizim, and from this secure platform "he lifted up his voice, and cried, Hearken unto me, ye men of Schechem, that God may hearken unto you.

"The trees went forth to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive-tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive-tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

"And the trees said unto the fig-tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig-tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and

my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees ?

“Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to rule over the trees ?

“Then said all the trees to the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come, and put your trust in my shadow ; and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.”

Jotham, having ended his parable, makes a pointed application of it. He severely reproves the Schechemites for their ingratitude to his father, for their cruelty in murdering his seventy sons, and their folly in choosing the base-born Abimelech rather than one of the legal descendants of the noble Gideon. He concludes by saying sarcastically, “If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him rejoice in you : but if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Schechem, and the house of Millo ; and let fire come out from the men of Schechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech.”

The subsequent history of the Schechemites and of their bramble king shows how strikingly

“upon them came the curse of Jotham, the son of Jerubbaal” (Judges ix. 57).

Dr. Hales thus speaks of Jotham’s reproof of the Schechemites:—“In the oldest and most beautiful apologue of antiquity extant, *the trees choosing a king*; with the mild and unassuming dispositions of his pious and honourable brethren, declining, like their father, we may suppose, the crown, when offered to them, perhaps, successively; under the imagery of the *olive-tree*, the *fig-tree*, and the *vine*, he pointedly contrasts the upstart ambition and arrogance of the wicked and turbulent Abimelech, represented by the *bramble*, inviting his new and nobler subjects, the *cedars of Lebanon*, to put their trust in his pigmy shadow, which they did not want, and which he was unable to afford them; but threatening them imperiously, on their refusal, to send forth a fire from *himself* to devour those *cedars*; whereas the fire of the *bramble* was short and momentary, even to a proverb (Ps. lviii. 9; Eccles. vii. 6).”—*Hales’s Chronology*, vol. ii. p. 285.

The parable addressed by Nathan to David is not inferior to that of Jotham. It is difficult to decide which is most to be admired—the skill, the beauty, or the force of the prophet’s words. Had Nathan in plain ungarnished language rebuked the King as John the Baptist did Herod, he might possibly have shared a similar fate; for

the man who had so basely murdered Uriah might have been guilty of the minor sin of shutting up the prophet in prison. But with what inimitable skill does he prepare the royal culprit to discern his own guilt, and pronounce his own condemnation! and then with what terrible force does he utter the truth concealed in the parable, "Thou art the man!" Conscience at once asserts her supreme authority; the guilty monarch is convicted and condemned; his wrath and indignation against the fictitious traveller are turned against himself; and he can find no peace until he resolves, "I will confess my transgression unto the Lord," and was able to say, "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. xxxii. 5. Compare with 2 Sam. xii. 1—14).

Dr. Hales justly remarks that "this fall of David is one of the most instructive and alarming recorded in that most faithful and impartial of all histories, the HOLY BIBLE. The transgression of one idle and unguarded moment pierced him through with many sorrows, and embittered the remainder of his life" (vol. ii. p. 342). Yet we may observe how wonderfully the all-wise God has overruled for good this almost unparalleled crime, perpetrated by one whom He had once designated as "a man after his own heart." What a comment it is on the Divine caution, "Let him that thinketh he

standeth take heed lest he fall !” On the other hand, how strikingly are we taught that the vilest sinner ought not to yield to despair ! If David’s fall teaches us to distrust ourselves, his recovery teaches us, however great our guilt, to hope in the mercy of our heavenly Father.

The extent to which the universal Church has been profited by this painful history is incalculable. Had David never thus fallen, the fifty-first Psalm, pre-eminently the Psalm of the self-condemned and contrite criminal, would never have been written. The feelings expressed by the royal penitent have for nearly three thousand years found a response in the hearts of innumerable multitudes. His experience has been a light to guide many desponding souls out of the dungeon of despair ; and the truths embodied in this Psalm have strengthened the weak hands and confirmed the feeble knees of backsliders in seasons of darkest perplexity ; they have heard a voice from heaven “ say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong ; fear not ” (Isa. xxxv. 3, 4).

Nathan’s exquisite parable has intensified the interest which the sacred narrative excites. It paints in deepest colours the guilt of David, and thus aids us more fully to appreciate the love of Him who is “ gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy ” (Ps. cxlv. 8).

Parables frequently occur in the prophetic writings, especially in those of Ezekiel. The style and character of these parables are greatly varied, and are adapted to the condition of the captives in Babylon, sunk as they were in moral degradation. This must be kept in mind in order to our fully apprehending their meaning. God adapts his revelations to men according to their moral and spiritual condition. This great principle is enunciated in Ps. xviii. 25, 26 :—

“ With the merciful, thou wilt show thyself merciful ;
With an upright man, thou wilt show thyself
upright ;
With the pure, thou wilt show thyself pure ;
And with the froward, thou wilt show thyself
froward ;”

i.e. by frustrating their evil designs.

This accounts for the peculiar style of some of Ezekiel's parables, especially those contained in the sixteenth and in the twenty-third chapters of his prophecy. They were addressed to the captive Jews in Babylon, who, for their idolatry and its attendant moral pollution, had been rooted out from the holy city, and cast into a heathen land, polluted by idols and idolaters. This unfaithfulness of God's chosen people to their covenant with Him (the first condition of which was, “Thou shalt have no other god beside me”) had been represented by former prophets (as Hosea and

Jeremiah) under the figure of adultery. God himself thus speaks of the idolatry of his people: "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord" (Jer. iii. 20). Ezekiel addresses a people sunk in the lowest depths of moral pollution; and he employs imagery drawn from the unfaithfulness and uncleanness with which they were too familiar, to set forth their spiritual infidelity in forsaking their covenant God, and devoting their affections and giving their worship to idols. Conjugal infidelity is the most offensive and the most unpardonable of all social crimes; it is, therefore, most aptly chosen to depict the abhorrent character of idolatry, the most abominable of spiritual offences, being the most dishonouring to God, and the fruitful source of all moral evil. The picture of this grosser uncleanness may be offensive to modern ears, and to the refinement of English society; but it was the most impressive that could be presented to the eyes of those whom it was intended to reform—men "having eyes full of adultery, and who could not cease from sin" (2 Peter ii. 14).

On this subject Dr. John Smith remarks, "The figurative mode of describing idolatry by spiritual adultery, often used by the prophets, is pursued with great force and at considerable

length both in the sixteenth and twenty-third chapters of Ezekiel. We are not to judge of those metaphors by modern ideas, but by those of the times and places in which they were used, where it is probable that many of the expressions might not sound so harshly as they do to us. It must likewise be remembered that the prophet's design was to raise the highest detestation of idolatry, and that such metaphors were well calculated for this purpose."

On the twenty-third chapter of Ezekiel Archbishop Newcombe remarks, "The style of this chapter, like that of the sixteenth, is adapted to men among whom, at that time, no refinement existed. Large allowance must be made for language addressed to an ancient Eastern people in the worst period of their history, all whose ideas were sensual, and whose grand inducement to idolatry seems to have been the brutal impurities which it encouraged."

Our Lord, who "spake as never man spake," frequently taught by parables. This was what might have been expected, as the Jews delighted in this mode of instruction. As the parables recorded in the Old Testament are very diversified in style and spirit, being adapted to the moral condition of those to whom they were addressed, so eminently are those of the Great Teacher. The first parable uttered by Him was that of the

sower, and the reason why He adopted this method is recorded ; for the disciples, observing this novel feature in the preaching of our Lord, asked Him, "Why speakest thou to them in parables?" The answer was, "Because they seeing see not ; and hearing they hear not ; neither do they understand" (Matt. xiii. 13). They had closed their eyes to the miracles of the Lord ; they had closed their ears to his teaching. They had been guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, by attributing the miracles He performed to the agency of Beelzebub. Hence the style in which our Lord began his ministry, by pronouncing blessings on the poor in spirit, was changed for a style more difficult to be understood. To the proud his teaching was more dark and perplexing ; to the humble it became more clear, interesting, and impressive ; for "when they were alone, He expounded all things to his disciples" (Mark iv. 34). The stone laid by God in Zion proved a sure foundation to the humble and teachable disciple, but "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, to them that stumbled at the word, being disobedient" (1 Peter ii. 8).

But however enigmatically our Lord might speak to the Pharisees, and to all who sought "to entangle Him in his talk," his style was very different when surrounded by an attentive and teachable audience. When, as St. Luke records,

there “drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him, and the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them,” then it was that He spoke that parable, incomparable in beauty, in tenderness, and in force—the parable of the Prodigal Son. The great truth, “God is love,” is announced by the beloved disciple; but in this parable of our Lord we see, as in a life-breathing picture, the human father, emblem of the Divine Father, discerning his disobedient child afar off, moved with compassion, running to him, and falling on his neck and kissing him; ordering the best robe to be put on him, the feast of joy to be prepared, and exclaiming, “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke xv.).

It ought ever to be kept in mind that this the grandest of all parables, being the fullest revelation of the Divine Father’s heart, was uttered by the Redeemer mainly for the encouragement and elevation of the very scum of a city population—the publicans and sinners of Jerusalem, whose very touch was considered as contamination by the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. The prodigal son, far from home and perishing with hunger, was the representative of the class despised by sanctimonious professors; whilst the tender and loving father, pressing to his heart his

unworthy but penitent son, sets forth the love of God to all who repent and turn to Him. Such shall in nowise be cast out.

It is very remarkable that, although our Lord so freely used parables to convey instruction, none of his apostles imitated the style of their Master. Not a single parable is recorded, either in their speeches or in their writings. One would have thought that the style of the Great Teacher—a style so popular amongst the Jews—would have been the model for those whom He sent forth to proclaim his Gospel. But no; they occasionally quote a proverb (as 2 Peter ii. 22), but they never attempt a parable. Can we discover the reason for this? We think we can.

Parables and dark sayings were adapted to the Mosaic dispensation; they conserved the truth which was eventually to be developed; they also awakened interest in its discovery. But when the Saviour's mission on earth was completed, an apostle declared, "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (1 John ii. 8). In his last discourse to his disciples, on the eve of his apprehension, our Lord said to them, "These things have I spoken unto you in parables; but the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in parables, but I shall tell you plainly concerning the Father" (John xvi. 25, Alford's version). This promise He fulfilled on the day of

Pentecost, by pouring out upon them that “unction from the Holy One which should teach them all things” (1 John ii. 20). Taught by the Divine Spirit what they should say, they “used great plainness of speech” (2 Cor. iii. 12). “The veil is taken away” when the heart is turned to the Lord; and all Christians are invited to behold, with unveiled face, the glory of the Lord, until they be “transfigured into the same image by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. iii. 18).

The apostles, having been thus taught, “no longer in parables, but plainly, concerning the Father,” preached plainly the great truths in which they had been instructed. They proclaimed the Father’s love, manifested in his “sending his Son to be the Saviour of the world;” and they urged all men to repent and to believe the Gospel. They bore testimony to the fact of his death and his resurrection, and of his exaltation to the throne of universal empire, and that God has appointed a day in which He will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. These are the facts on which Christianity is based, and these facts speak plainly concerning the Father. Dark sayings and enigmas are out of place, and parables of human origin would shade rather than increase the lustre of these grand truths.

SECTION III.—HYPERBOLE.

“ This figure, in its representation of things or objects, either magnifies or diminishes them beyond or below their proper limits : it is common in all languages, and is of frequent occurrence in Scripture.”—*Horne's Introduction*.

(1.) An example of the magnifying hyperbole is found in Jer. xv. 8 : “ Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas.” An example of the diminishing hyperbole is in Num. xiii. 33 : “ And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak ; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.”

To interpret *figurative* language *literally* would make multitudes of Scripture statements express what is false and absurd. When the psalmist would record his deep grief at beholding the ungodliness of men, he says, “ *Rivers* of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law ” (Ps. cxix. 136). In the elegy composed by David for Saul and Jonathan he says, “ They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions ”—not literally, but this hyperbolic style is adopted to declare their extraordinary swiftness and strength (2 Sam. i. 23).

Our Lord frequently used hyperbolical language, but on most occasions He merely adopted

the expressions current amongst the Jews. These were familiar to *them*, but some of them are incomprehensible to ordinary English readers. We shall give one or two examples.

“But if ye have faith, and shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done” (Matt. xxi. 21).

Dr. Lightfoot remarks, “This is a hyperbolical way of speaking, taken from the common language of the schools of the Jews, and designed after a manner for their refutation.”—(*Works*, vol. xi. p. 259.) “He speaketh hyperbolically, for the magnifying of the power and excellency of faith. . . . Christ, in this expression, speaks the Jews’ own language, and by the very phrase they ordinarily used to magnify their own abilities He magnifieth faith. When they would speak of the high parts and qualities of their great ones, they used to say, ‘He is a remover of mountains.’” The same author quotes from the Talmud:—“Ben Azzai taught profoundly in the streets of Tiberias, and there was no man in his days that was a remover of mountains like him.”—(*Works*, vol. iii. p. 135.) Our Lord declares to his apostles that “all things are possible to him that believeth;” that all difficulties should be overcome by faith; and he probably had in mind the words of the prophet Zechariah, “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become

a plain. And he shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, saying, Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. iv. 7). In his comment on the first part of this verse Lowth remarks, "*Removing mountains, and levelling them into plains, are proverbial for overcoming the greatest difficulties, and removing all obstacles that lie in our way*" (see Isa. xl. 4). Referring to the head-stone, he says that "this denoted the Messiah." Our Lord's own words confirm this interpretation; for He said to the Jews, "Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner?" (Matt. xxi. 42.) Lowth adds the exposition of the Chaldee Paraphrase, "*His Messiah shall come forth, who was named from all eternity, and shall obtain the empire of all the kingdoms of the earth*; and St. Jerome tells us that the ancient Jews explained it so." —*Lowth on Zech.*

The knowledge of Scripture symbols gives peculiar force to the words by which our Lord commends to his apostles that faith which would remove mountains. Heathen kingdoms, like that of Assyria, established by rapine and cruelty, are described in Scripture as "mountains of prey" (Ps. lxxvi. 4). All these, being opposed to the universal reign of Him who is the "King of righteousness and the King of peace," must be removed, that the King whom God hath set upon

his holy hill may have universal dominion, that "all kings may fall down before Him, and that all nations may serve Him" (Ps. lxxii. 11). Faith is the mighty power by which this great revolution is to be accomplished: faith in God's truth, and faith in God's power. "All things are possible to him that believeth." The faith requisite on the part of all Christ's servants is a living, vigorous, and ever-growing faith, aptly described as "faith like a grain of mustard seed, which is indeed the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs." The faith, and the kingdom established by it, are alike well represented by the grain of mustard seed: both are small in their commencement, but both ever growing. The apostles, by preaching the Gospel, were to overturn "the mountains of prey," in order that "the mountain of the Lord's house might be established in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills" (Isa. ii. 2).

(2.) "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. xix. 24).

This, says Dr. Lightfoot, is "a phrase used in the schools, intimating a thing very unusual and very difficult. . . . Rabbi Theshith answered Rabbi Amram, disputing with him, and asserting something that was incongruous, in these words, 'Perhaps thou art one of those of Pumbeditha [a

Jewish college in Babylon] who can make an elephant pass through the eye of a needle?' that is, who speak things that are impossible."

We find a similar expression in the Koran:—"The impious shall find the gates of heaven shut; nor shall he enter there till a camel shall pass through the eye of a needle."

"The authors of an edition of the book *Zohar* express the arduous nature of their undertaking by saying, 'In the name of our God, we have seen fit to bring an elephant through the eye of a needle' " (see "*Pictorial Bible*"). This form of expression is still used extensively in the East. "Narrower than the eye of a needle" is still applied to business of a difficult nature; and even in India "an elephant going through a little door," or "through the eye of a needle," are proverbial expressions of the same import.

These hyperbolical expressions were familiar to Jewish ears, and they were chosen by our Lord to declare emphatically how impossible it is "for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God."

(3.) We find a similar hyperbole in Matt. xxiii. 24: "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."

The note on this in the "*Pictorial Bible*" is valuable:—"In the East, where insects of all kinds and sizes abound, it is difficult to keep

clear of insects liquors which are left for the least time uncovered; for which reason it was and is usual to strain the wine before drinking, to prevent insects from passing into the drinking vessel. Beside the common motive of cleanliness for this practice, the Jews considered that they had another and more imperative one—that of religious purity. For as the law forbade them to eat ‘flying creeping things,’ they thought themselves bound to be particularly careful in this matter. The Talmud contains many curious explanations and directions relating to it. Thus, ‘One that eats a flea or a gnat is an apostate, and is no more to be counted one of the congregation.’ It seems, however, that a person doing this might, under certain circumstances, escape further consequences by submitting to be scourged. ‘Whosoever eats a whole fly, or a whole gnat, whether alive or dead, is to be beaten on account of the flying creeping thing.’” *

Our Lord’s object is to reprove the Pharisees, who, whilst very punctilious in ceremonial observances, disregarded the “weightier matters of the law—judgment, and the love of God.” The camel, and every creeping thing that flieth, were alike prohibited as unclean by the law of Moses (Deut. xiv. 7, 19). The gnat, therefore, was a suitable emblem of minor offences, and the camel of presumptuous sins. The self-righteous Phari-

* See Note B, p. 472.

see would on no account omit repeating his prayers, or wearing his phylacteries; but he would indulge in the grossest sensuality. At the very time they were contriving the murder of the Holy One, they would not go "into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled" (John xviii. 28).

The following valuable remarks are from the pen of the learned editor of Calmet's "Dictionary:"—"Hyperbolical expressions are but rare in Scripture, though figurative or poetic expressions are abundant: rare as they are, however, they have been severely commented upon by infidels, and occasionally have embarrassed believers. There is certainly some force in the reflection, 'What would infidels have said, had it pleased God to have chosen Eastern Asia instead of Western Asia for the seat of Revelation? What would they have thought of the most correct truth, had it happened under the influence of such locality, to have been arrayed in the hyperbolic attire of that country?'

"Why should we suppress another observation? By making Western Asia the seat of Revelation, a medium is obtained between European frigidity, as Asiatics would think it, and Asiatic hyperbole, as Europeans would think it; so that the Asiatic may find some similarity to his own metaphorical manner, and suited to excite *his* attention; while the European, who professes to be charmed with the simplicity of truth, may find in Scripture

abundance of that simplicity, most happily adapted to *his* more sober judgment, his more correct and better-regulated taste."

One example of the intensely Oriental style may be quoted from the same source:—"Gospaat, king of the world, possessed matchless good fortune ; he was lord of two brides, the earth and her wealth. When his innumerable army marched, *the heavens were so filled with the dust of their feet, that the birds of the air could rest upon it.*"—*Fragments*, No. 122.

After this we may read without trepidation the closing verse of St. John's Gospel:—

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

However staggering this summing up may be to the disciples of the Colenso school, to the Oriental mind it would be felt only to be very striking, and by no means extravagant, as is shown by a note in the "Pictorial Bible:"—"This is a very strong but significant hyperbole, to express the numerous acts of Christ, of which it would seem that only a small proportion have been recorded. Such hyperboles, similarly designed to convey a large meaning, are very common among the old Jewish writers. . . . It is

very usual for them to say, that if such and such things were done, the world would not be able to bear them. The following form of expression, slightly varied, is rather common to express something extensive:—‘If all the seas were ink, and all the reeds pens, and the whole heaven and earth parchment, and all the sons of men scribes, they would not suffice to write all the lessons which such a person composed,’ or all the wisdom which such another person possessed, or all the law which another person learned” (vol. iv. p. 259).

One more illustration will suffice. Speaking of Solomon, the author of Ecclesiasticus says, “Thy soul covered the whole earth, and thou filledst it with parables” (Ecclus. xlvii. 15). If we compare this saying with the closing words of St. John, and keep in mind that “a greater than Solomon is here,” we shall feel that the words of the evangelist, however strange to English ears, were to Jewish ears natural and impressive. It is not more extravagant than the description given in the Talmud of the terrible slaughter of the Jews made by Hadrian at the destruction of the city of Bitter: “The horses waded in blood up to the nostrils, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs” (compare Rev. xiv. 20). “Of that space and extent doth Rabbi Menaham reckon the largeness of the land of Israel.”—*Lightfoot*, vol. iii. p. 352.



CHAPTER VII.

POETICAL LANGUAGE.

“The purpose of poetry is to instruct while it gives pleasure; instruction being the end, and pleasure the means.”—BISHOP LOWTH.

“Poetry is much less likely to be corrupted than prose. So faithful a preserver of truth is metre, that what is liable to be changed, augmented, or violated almost daily in prose, may continue for ages in verse, without variation, without even a change in the obsolete phraseology.”—MICHAELIS.

TO impart instruction in a pleasing manner, and to conserve truth in a permanent form, are, according to the eminent critics above quoted, the two great ends of poetry. It combines pleasure with utility. Hebrew poetry presents to our mental vision a wide field, full of beauty and full of interest. Its influence over the minds of mankind has been greater than that of all the classic poetry of ancient and modern times. And it is an influence which is ever increasing. The subject is inexhaustible. All that can be at-

tempted now is to make some suggestions which may help the Scripture student better to understand these remarkable compositions, and to discern their incomparable beauty.

The language of poetry is essentially different from that of prose. The latter deals mainly with facts or arguments ; consequently, clearness and precision are its greatest excellence. The former is highly figurative, and frequently fictitious : imagination and ornament are its distinctive characteristics. Poets indulge in great license, both in language and in metaphor. The well-known lines of Shakespeare express the action of their minds and its result :—

“ The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to
heaven ;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The form of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothings
A local habitation, and a name.”

Hence it is obvious that to interpret the language of poetry literally, as we usually do that of prose, must lead to serious errors. And as a large portion of the Old Testament consists of poetry, and this mostly of the very highest order, it is necessary to distinguish the poetical from the prosaic portion, that each may be rightly interpreted.

SECTION I.—THE ORIGIN AND CONSTRUCTION OF
HEBREW POETRY.

The most ancient specimen of poetry in the Bible—we may say in the world—is that composed by Lamech, the descendant of Cain, and recorded in Gen. iv. 23, 24:—

“And Lamech said unto his wives :
Adah and Zillah, hear my voice,
Wives of Lamech, give ear unto my speech ;
For I slay a man, if he woundeth me,
Even a young man, if he hurteth me.
Lo ! Cain would be avenged seven fold,
But Lamech seventy and seven fold.”

Speaker's Commentary.

The following note is from the same source as the translation :—

“The speech of Lamech has exercised the skill of translators and interpreters of all times. Its obscure and enigmatical character is admitted as a mark of its remote antiquity, even by the most unfavourable critics. The apparent meaning of the words is this :—Amid the violence of the times, especially among the descendants of Cain, Lamech comforts his wives with the assurance that with the aid of the bronze and iron instruments now in his hands (see v. 22) he could kill any one

who injured him ('I slay, or would slay a man for wounding me'), and that if it had been promised to Cain that he should be avenged sevenfold, there was power in the hands of Lamech's family to avenge seventy-sevenfold. The speech is one of confident boasting. Lamech trusts in his weapons of brass and steel to maintain his cause, even when referring to words used by God to his forefather Cain." This is the most recent interpretation of Lamech's words. No doubt he clothed his thoughts with verse, in order that they might be more easily remembered by his wives, for whose encouragement in that lawless period the lines were composed.

The importance of these three couplets of ancient verse has not been fully estimated. Although composed probably more than two thousand years before the Hebrews existed as a nation, this short ode appears to have been the model after which their splendid poetry was formed. This resulted from Moses having introduced it in the Book of Genesis, the writings of their great lawgiver being the fountain whence Jewish ideas and Jewish modes of expression are mainly drawn. The construction of Hebrew poetry is very peculiar. It does not consist in rhyme, or a defined number of feet, as English verse. Its distinctive characteristic is what has been termed the parallelism. Of this Lamech's words afford

a good illustration. The reader will easily discern that the second line in each couplet repeats, with some verbal variation, what is expressed in the first. "Wives of Lamech" corresponds with "Adah and Zillah;" whilst "give ear to my speech" corresponds with "hear my voice." The same correspondence is observable in the two remaining couplets. The first part of the third line, "For I slay a man," corresponds with the first part of the fourth line, "Even a young man;" and the latter clauses of these lines bear the same character, "If he woundeth me"—"If he hurteth me." In the last couplet Cain and Lamech are contrasted, and the sevenfold vengeance of the one with the seventy-and-sevenfold vengeance of the other.

Another feature observable in these lines, and which pervades a great portion of Hebrew poetry, is that the second line is not simply a repetition of the first, but that it adds somewhat to the meaning and force of the first. "Adah and Zillah" are merely proper names; but "Wives of Lamech" expresses the most endearing relationship. "Give ear unto my speech" is more impressive than "hear my voice," as it invokes attention to intelligent utterances, which the other may not; for whilst *voice* may be merely sound *heard*, but not regarded, *speech* expresses intelligent ideas to which we *give ear*. In the

third line Lamech says, "For I slay a man;" but in the fourth line great force is added to his declaration of self-defence, when he adds, "Even a *young* man," however strong and active. Probably Lamech was advanced in years, but he relied on his son's newly invented weapons to make him more than a match even for a youthful assailant. The words used in the second part of this couplet are remarkable as expressing the same increase of meaning; for in the first line he threatens to slay any man who *woundeth* him; and in the next, to slay even a young man who only *hurteth* him. This threat of killing any one who should simply *hurt* him was the seventy-and-sevenfold vengeance which even minor offenders might expect. The contrast of it with the sevenfold vengeance denounced on the murderer of Cain is an extraordinary addition to what is expressed in the line preceding. This feature in Hebrew poetry is termed the *gradational* or *progressive parallelism*. The careful observation of it will enable us to apprehend more fully the meaning of the Holy Scriptures, and to discern more clearly their force and beauty.

It is worthy of note that our Saviour appears to refer to these words of Lamech when, in answer to Peter's inquiry, "Lord, how often shall my brother trespass against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?" He replied, "I say not

unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven" (Matt. xviii. 21, 22). The contrast between Lamech's words and those of the Divine Teacher is very forcible. Lamech declares his determination to be revenged "seventy and seven fold;" Christ commands his disciple to forgive injuries, although repeated seventy times sevenfold. Lamech *adds* seventy to seven; our Lord *multiplies* seven by seventy. A beautiful illustration of the spirit of his Gospel, and enforced by his own Divine example when, in his agony on the cross, He prayed for the men who had just ruthlessly driven the nails into his hands and his feet—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke xxiii. 34). And inasmuch as one great object of his being "manifested in the flesh" was that He might "make known the Father," how beautifully does He thus proclaim the infinite compassion of Him who "is good, and ready to forgive, slow to anger, and of great mercy!"

These verses of Lamech are the only existing specimen of antediluvian poetry—a most valuable relic of the ancient world. The sacred historian records another interesting poem in the post-diluvian prophecy of Noah concerning the future of his three sons and their descendants. The following is Boothroyd's version :—

{ “Accursed shall Ham be in his son Canaan ;
{ The most abject slave shall he be to his brethren.
{ Blessed of Jehovah, my God, shall Shem be ;
{ Yea, among the tents of Shem shall He dwell ;
{ And to Shem shall Canaan be a slave.
{ God shall greatly enlarge Japheth ;
{ And to him also shall Canaan be a slave ”
(Gen. ix. 25—27).

The variation from the authorised version is sanctioned by Archbishop Secker and other critics. It declares that God (not Japheth) shall dwell in the tents of Shem; which prediction refers to the worship of God being established in this branch of Noah’s descendants. This is adverted to very beautifully by the psalmist :—

“ In Judah is God known ;
His name is great in Israel ;
In Salem also is his tabernacle ;
And his dwelling-place in Zion ”
(Ps. lxxvi. 1, 2).

The threefold repetition of the curse denounced on Canaan by his father makes the prophecy in this particular very emphatic.

From the death of Noah to the time of Isaac no specimen of poetry is recorded. The blessing conferred by the aged patriarch on his son Jacob deserves attention, because it shows how closely the verse follows the model of Lamech’s :—

{ “ May God give thee of the dew of heaven,
 { And of the fatness of the earth,
 { Abundance also of corn, of wine, and of oil ;
 To thee may peoples be subject ;
 To thee may nations bow down !
 Be thou Lord over thine own brethren,
 And let thy mother’s sons to thee pay homage.
 Accursed be he who curseth thee ;
 And be he blessed that blesseth thee ”
 (Gen. xxvii. 28, 29, Boothroyd’s version).

From the construction of these lines we may infer that Lamech’s ode, composed, probably, two thousand years previously, had been known and remembered very extensively, and had been made, by various Oriental people, the model of similar compositions.

The greatly diminished value of the blessing conferred on Esau appears more clearly in Dr. Boothroyd’s translation than in the authorised version :—

“ Behold, remote from the fatness of the earth,
 And the dew of the heavens, shall be thy dwelling :
 On thy own desert shalt thou live,
 And to thy brother thou shalt be subject :
 But the time will come when thou shalt prevail,
 And break his yoke from off thy neck ” (39, 40).

The last words of Jacob, in which he predicts the future, severally, of his sons, are an example

of what Bishop Lowth designates the "Cygnean song." In patriarchal times, when the father of the family was also the priest, such dying utterances were regarded as having an oracular signification. These predictions, so remarkably fulfilled, of the dying patriarch bear the stamp of more than human foresight. We shall quote only one portion, that in which Jacob denounces the cruelty of Simeon and Levi, for having so treacherously slaughtered the Schechemites : this will show how the style of Lamech's ode was retained :—

"Simeon and Levi are brethren ;
They accomplished by violence their schemes.
Enter not, my soul, into their counsel ;
Join not, mine honour, their assembly :
For in their anger they slew the men ;
And in their self-will they cut off the princes.
Accursed be their anger, for it was fierce ;
And their wrath, for it was cruel !
I will divide them in Jacob ;
And disperse them in Israel "

(Gen. xlix. 5—7, Boothroyd's version).

These predictions were uttered in the land of Egypt, two or three hundred years, probably, before Moses had recorded Lamech's ode in the Book of Genesis. We have seen how the style of this short poem had survived the Deluge, and had been adopted by Noah in foretelling the

future of his sons. We have seen also how, some centuries after, it was imitated by Isaac in pronouncing his blessing on Jacob and on Esau ; and subsequently, how it was adopted by Jacob himself in predicting the future of the twelve tribes. If we examine, also, the predictions of Balaam, we shall see the same style has been chosen. The first section of his prophecy will prove this very clearly :—

“ From Aram, Balak hath brought me,
The king of Moab, from the mountains of Kedem.
Come, saith he, curse, for me, Jacob,
Come, and execrate, for me, Israel.
How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed ?
How execrate whom Jehovah hath not execrated ?
When, from the top of the rocks, I see them ;
And, from the lofty hills, I behold them ;
Lo ! they are a people that shall dwell alone,
And shall not be reckoned among the nations.
Who shall count the dust-like seed of Jacob ?
Who shall number the multitude of Israel ?
May I die the death of the righteous,
And may my last end be like theirs ! ”

(Num. xxiii. 7—10, Boothroyd's version.)

Now, as Balaam had come from Mesopotamia to the land of Moab, it is evident that the style of verse usually called the Hebrew parallelism was no local peculiarity. As Bishop Lowth observes, “ This kind of poetry was neither

originally the production of Moses, nor peculiar to the Jewish nation, but may be accounted among the first-fruits of human ingenuity, and was cultivated by the Hebrew and other Eastern nations from the first ages, as the recorder of events, the preceptor of morals, the historian of the past, and the prophet of the future.”—*Lectures*, vol. i. p. 97.

It is interesting, and also important, to notice that Balaam not only adopts the style of the Hebrew poets, but expresses sentiments in accordance with Hebrew prophecies. As Dr. Hales justly remarks, “The prophecies of Balaam are most curious and important; they seem to be dictated by the same spirit as those of Jacob, of which they furnish the continuation and development; and thereby prove that the gift of prophecy was by no means confined to the chosen seed, as the Jews boast.”—(*Hales’s Chronology*, vol. ii. p. 202.) Enoch and Noah prophesied before the call of Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation; subsequently to whom Balaam is the only prophet, not descended from him, of whom we have any record. His history, as Dr. Hales remarks, furnishes an awful and alarming example that extraordinary “*gifts of the SPIRIT*” are not always accompanied by the genuine “*fruits of the SPIRIT*” in the hearts and lives of the possessors, and that without *charity* the rarest gifts and endowments

are nothing worth (1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2; Matt. vii. 22; Hales's "Chronology," vol. ii. p. 202).

Great instruction may be derived from nicely observing the progressive force in each line of the gradational parallelism. The first Psalm furnishes a beautiful example:—

"Blessed is the man
That walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor standeth in the way of sinners,
Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

A threefold variety is here three times expressed, each of the three related words indicating an advance upon its predecessor. Note first the words "walketh, standeth, sitteth;" next, "the counsel, the way, the seat;" and lastly, "the ungodly, sinners, the scornful." He who begins to walk in the counsel of the ungodly (*i.e.* adopts their sentiments) will soon be found standing in the way of sinners (*i.e.* imitating their corrupt practices), and will eventually be found sitting in the seat of the scornful, which, in Jewish phraseology, means, he will not only become a scorner himself, but will teach others also to become scorners (compare Matt. xxiii. 2).

Very frequently the second line explains the first, as in Ps. lxxiii. 1:—

"Truly God is good to Israel,
Even to such as are of a clean heart."

Here the second line is progressive, and shows plainly that it is to the spiritual Israel that God is emphatically good.

The most striking and most sublime example of the progressive parallelism is found in the prophecy of Habakkuk :—

“ Art thou not from everlasting, O Jehovah ?

My God, mine Holy One, we shall not die ”

(Hab. i. 12, Boothroyd’s version).

The prophet, personating the Jewish people, pleads with God for the eventual restoration of their national life, after the judgment of the approaching Chaldean invasion shall have accomplished its purpose. The connection between the everlasting existence of Israel’s God and the continued existence of Israel’s nationality is most significant, the couplet commencing with the one, and closing with the other. It harmonizes with the truth declared by God himself—

“ For I am Jehovah ; I change not ;

Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed ”

(Mal. iii. 6).

But what is most noticeable is, the three distinct names by which Habakkuk addresses the Deity, and the progressive nearness of relation which their order indicates. His words are addressed first to JEHOVAH, the Self-existing, the

Eternal, the Unchangeable One ; but they express no especial relationship to the Divine Being. In the next name, "MY GOD," such relationship is expressed ; a personal interest is implied ; an appropriation to himself of Him whom "the earth and heaven cannot contain." It is equivalent to the words of another prophet, "Jehovah is my portion, saith my soul" (Lam. iii. 24). Can any advance be made on such a declaration ? Yes. It is made in the third appellative, "MINE HOLY ONE." By no other sacred writer has such language been used in addressing Him who, as the same prophet declares, is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who cannot look on iniquity" (Hab. i. 13). For a man who, like all the descendants of Adam, was "by nature a child of wrath, even as others" (Eph. ii. 2), to look his Maker in the face and address Him as "MINE HOLY ONE," thus appropriating to himself a personal interest in this the most resplendent of the Divine perfections, appears, at first sight, daring presumption. It is, in reality, filial love. How did he attain to this exalted state, so far above that of his fellow-men ? No doubt it was because he had had revealed to him and had apprehended that great and fundamental truth of the Gospel, "The just shall live by faith" (compare Hab. ii. 4 with Gal. iii. 11). This it was which enabled him not only to "rejoice in the

Lord, and to give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" (Ps. xxx. 4), but also to realise his personal interest in this Divine perfection, and to address Jehovah not only as "MY GOD," but also as "MINE HOLY ONE."

"The Holy One of Israel" is a phrase not infrequent in Scripture, and in one place God himself declares to his people—

"I am Jehovah, *your* Holy One ;
The Creator of Israel, *your* King "
(Isa. xliii. 15) ;

thus authorising, in this singular connection, the use of the possessive pronoun. But Habakkuk alone, of all the saints and prophets named in Scripture, has expressed his personal interest in this Divine perfection (one so glorious that, on naming it, the seraphim "veil their faces with their wings," Isa. vi.), and has addressed Jehovah not only as "my God," but also as "MINE HOLY ONE." Few, very few, draw so nigh unto Him "who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, or can see" (1 Tim. vi. 16). The holiness of God, so terrible to the ungodly, is the source of purest and divinest satisfaction to the holy prophet. When realised on earth, it is the richest foretaste of heavenly blessedness.

The result of this close communion with the

Holy One appears strikingly in that most beautiful ode at the close of this book. In prophetic vision Habakkuk beheld the fearful desolation approaching his beloved country; he saw the fruit trees cut down and burnt; he saw the fields of harvest reaped by the spoiler; he saw the flocks and the herds driven away by the marauding foe; he looked upon the land once "flowing with milk and honey," and beheld nothing but a desolate wilderness; every earthly source of enjoyment was cut off. But the prophet was not left desolate. The devastation of the sacred soil did not deprive him of his own inalienable possession; he could still look up to God, and address Him as "mine Holy One;" and, gazing on the universal desolation, he could still sing—

"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom,
Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
The labour of the olive shall fail,
And the fields shall yield no meat;
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,
And there shall be no herd in the stalls:
Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah,
I will joy in the God of my salvation "

(Hab. iii. 17, 18).

A period is approaching in the experience of every Christian when, like Habakkuk, he will feel that every earthly source of enjoyment has been cut off. Happy if, at this solemn crisis, he

can address Him before whose throne of judgment he is about to appear as "my God;" happier still if, raised to the prophet's spiritual elevation, he can add, "mine Holy One!"

Some parallelisms are antithetic. This occurs "when two lines correspond with one another by an opposition of terms and sentiments."—(*Bishop Lowth.*) Examples are frequent in the Book of Proverbs:—

"A wise son maketh a glad father ;
But a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother "
(Prov. x. 1).

And again :—

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper ; *
But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have
mercy " (Prov. xxviii. 13).

In the following extract we trace not only the antithetic parallelism, but also the introverted, in which the first line corresponds with the third, and the second with the fourth :—

"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses :
But we will remember the name of Jehovah, our God ;
They are brought down, and fallen ;
But we are risen, and stand upright " (Ps. xx. 7, 8).

* For the force of the negative expression, "not prosper," see the chapter on Idioms, pages 322—326. It amounts to a prediction that his fate shall be most disastrous.

Another example of the introverted parallelism in which the lines alternate is found in the last four lines of the following from Micah i. 3, 4 :—

“ For, behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place,
And will come down and tread upon the high places
of the earth.
And the mountains shall be molten under Him,
And the valleys shall be cleft,
As wax before the fire,
As waters poured down a steep place.”

In this extract the first two lines correspond, the third corresponds with the fifth, and the fourth with the sixth : “ The mountains shall be molten under Him, as wax before the fire ; and the valleys shall be cleft, as waters poured down a steep place.”

Another class of parallels is termed the *synthetic*, or *constructive*, in which, as Bishop Lowth observes, “ the parallelism consists only in the similar form of construction ; in which word does not answer to word, and sentence to sentence, as equivalent or opposite ; but there is a correspondence and equality between different propositions, in respect of the shape and turn of the whole sentence, and of the constructive parts ; such as noun answering to noun, verb to verb, member to member, negative to negative, interro-

gative to interrogative." The Bishop gives the following as an illustration :—

“Praise ye Jehovah, ye of the earth ;
Ye sea monsters, and all deeps :
Fire and hail, snow and vapour ;
Stormy wind, executing his command ;
Mountains, and all hills ;
Fruit trees, and all cedars :
Wild beasts and all cattle ;
Reptiles, and birds of wing :
Kings of the earth, and all peoples ;
Princes, and all judges of the earth :
Youths, and also virgins ;
Old men, together with the children :
Let them praise the name of Jehovah ;
For his name alone is exalted ;
His majesty, above earth and heaven ”
(Ps. cxlviii. 7—13).

SECTION II.—JOSHUA COMMANDING THE SUN AND MOON TO STAND STILL.

We shall proceed now to examine some portions of Scripture confessedly difficult, on which light may be thrown by our knowledge of Hebrew poetry. And we will begin with one which, though found in an historic book, and usually read as prose, and therefore received as historic, is evidently poetic. The event referred to is recorded in the Book of Joshua, who, whilst

engaged in a decisive battle with the Canaanites, is represented as commanding the sun and the moon to stand still. He is reported to have used the following couplet :—

“Sun, stand thou still over Gibeon ;
And thou, moon, over the valley of Ajalon ”
(Joshua x. 12).

The history adds, “And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves of their enemies. Is it not written in the Book of Jasher? Thus the sun stood still in the midst of the heavens, and hasted not to go down until the day was complete ” (Joshua x. 12, 13, Boothroyd’s version).

Some regard this record as a simple historic fact ; they ignore altogether any poetic element, and believe that the sun and the moon did actually, at the command of Joshua, stand still for some hours, to enable the Israelites effectually to destroy their enemies. If so, this is manifestly the most marvellous miracle ever performed, creation excepted.

Those who do not accept this interpretation argue that as we read, at the close of the Pentateuch, there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, &c., this statement is manifestly incorrect,

if the account of Joshua causing the sun and the moon to stand still is to be accepted as an historic fact, for in this case the miracle performed by "the captain of the Lord's host" greatly transcended any performed by the great prophet and lawgiver himself.* Further, it is very remarkable that Joshua, in his parting address to the people, reminds them of the miracles performed for them in Egypt, also of their passing through Jordan, the taking of Jericho, &c., but he makes not the slightest reference to this most stupendous of all miracles. Again, almost every other supernatural interposition on behalf of Israel finds a place in the Book of Psalms; the frogs, the flies, the darkness, and other plagues in Egypt are recorded; the passage of the Red Sea and of the Jordan; but there is no mention of the sun and the moon standing still. Finally, in the records of the wonders performed by faith, the apostle refers to those "who, through faith, stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire;" he repeats how by faith the Red Sea was passed, and how by faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been compassed about seven days; but of

* The author of the last chapter in Deuteronomy is unknown; but the closing verse implies that there had been prophets in Israel at the time when this statement concerning Moses was recorded.

the instantaneous arrest of the sun and the moon in their course, at the word of Joshua, no mention whatever is made (see Heb. xi.). St. Paul must have been familiar with the history of Joshua; and, on the supposition that he interpreted literally the record of the sun and the moon standing still, his omission is perfectly unaccountable. No illustration could have served his purpose so well, especially for the Hebrew Christians, to whom he was writing. Had he omitted it in an Epistle to a Gentile Church, it would have been less surprising. The Church which he addressed was perfectly familiar with this portion of the Hebrew record. What was "stopping the mouth of a lion," compared with stopping the course of the sun?

We get a gleam of light on this dark record in the interrogation, "Is it not written in the Book of Jasher?" What is this Book of Jasher? The Hebrew word means *the upright*; and it has been thought to have been so named because of its truthfulness. But it was evidently a poetic book. Only one other allusion is made to it in Scripture, and this is in the elegy composed by David on the death of Saul and Jonathan. Dr. Boothroyd thus renders the passage:—"David now lamented over Saul and over Jonathan his son with this lamentation; and he commanded it to be taught to the Judahites. Be-

hold it is written in the Book of Jasher." Then follows the elegy itself (2 Sam. i. 19—27). The learned editor of Calmet's "Dictionary" suggests that the Book of Jasher might contain not only the record of Joshua's victory and of David's lamentation, but also the songs of Moses, of Deborah, and others; and that the various poems resembled our old British ballads or border songs, commemorating the valiant deeds of the English and Scotch on the debatable lands before the union of the two crowns. He also adds, "It is disputed whether the citation from the Book of Jasher was inserted by Joshua himself, or by those who digested his memoirs and arranged his book in its present form. It is credible that this passage might have been inserted afterwards: we may easily observe that the Book of Joshua has received some additions."—*Calmet's Dictionary*, vol. i. p. 283.

Grotius was of opinion that the Book of Jasher was a triumphal song, written to commemorate this victory of Joshua. To this David's elegy was added. The songs of Moses, Deborah, and others were probably included.

This has led some to conclude that the account of the sun and the moon standing still at the command of Joshua is not an actual record of a fact, described precisely as it occurred, but a highly poetic figure, not without parallel in other Hebrew songs, to commemorate the fact that the day was

miraculously lengthened, whether by a supernatural refraction of light, or by the formation of a very luminous aurora borealis, either of which would answer the desired purpose, and would have the appearance of the sun and the moon standing still.

Similar imagery, at once bold and sublime, is employed by Deborah and Barak to celebrate their victory over the Canaanites:—

“ From the heavens the stars fought !

They fought in their courses against Sisera ”

(Judges v. 20, Boothroyd’s version).

This poetically describes the tempest which, meeting the enemy in the face, discomfited them, caused a sudden torrent in the Kishon, and thus swept them away. The language and imagery are truly sublime. But they must be read as poetry: if read as prose, they are simply extravagant and absurd.

Bishop Patrick, referring to the statement, “And the sun stood still,” quotes the poet Callimachus, who, “in his hymn to Diana, represents the sun as stopping the wheels of his chariot to behold a chorus of nymphs, which so highly pleased him, that it made him prolong the day.” Another poet thus expresses the deep sensation produced by an atrocious murder:—“At which the heavens blushed, and the sun stood still !” Lucan

gives an inflated description of the sun rising on the morning after the battle of Pharsalia, so ruinous to Pompey and his cause :—

“Late, and unwilling, from his watery bed,
Upreared the mournful sun his cloudy head ;
He sickened to behold Emathia’s plain,
And would have sought the backward East again ;
Full oft he turned him from his destined race,
And wished some dark eclipse might veil his
radiant face.”—*Lucan’s Pharsalia*, Book VII.

The Hebrew poets are in no respect inferior to those of Rome or Greece, whether in delicacy of taste or in boldness of metaphor. In that exquisite ode commemorating the Exodus, the psalmist gives a poetical version of what Moses, at the giving of the law, expresses, “The whole mountain quaked greatly” (Exod. xix. 18). This is the language of the historian ; but how different is the language of the poet ! His description is prefaced by a reference to the dividing of the Red Sea and the river Jordan :—

“The sea saw, and fled ;
Jordan was driven back ;
The mountains skipped like rams ;
The little hills, like lambs.
What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest ?
Thou, Jordan, that thou wast driven back ?
Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams ?

Ye little hills, like lambs ?

Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord,
At the presence of the God of Jacob ! ”

(Ps. cxiv. 3—7.)

As poetry this is exquisite ; if read as prose, it would be unspeakably ridiculous. Yet it is worth inquiring whether this want of discrimination is not chargeable on those who interpret literally the account of the sun and the moon standing still at the command of Joshua.

1. The first thing to be noted is, that the words, “ Sun, stand thou still over Gibeon,” &c., are a quotation from another book, and therefore formed no part of the narrative as originally composed by the sacred historian.

2. That “ the Book of Jasher,” from which this extract was taken, was an uninspired book, and not included in the sacred canon. It must have been the composition of several authors ; for whilst in all probability the event which it commemorates was thus poetically described during the life of Joshua, in order to perpetuate the record of his great victory, the book was still unfinished four hundred years after the event, for David’s elegy on the death of Saul and Jonathan was then added to it.

3. The Book of Jasher appears, from all existing evidence, to have been a collection of poems written to record great events in the history of

the Hebrew nation: a collection of national historic songs.

4. It is not likely that Joshua, who was eminently a practical man, would have enlisted the services of the moon in addition to those of the sun. A poet, his "eyes in a fine frenzy rolling," might invoke this superfluous aid; the commander of an army would not. The moon appears to have been introduced by the poet merely to complete the parallelism.

These things being considered, is it unreasonable to suppose that the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth verses are an interpolation, as the fifteenth verse confessedly is, being a duplicate of the forty-third? Some scribe, in writing out a copy of the Book of Joshua, and being familiar with the Book of Jasher, may have inserted it in the original history. Its insertion causes a marked dislocation in the record of the battle.

To this supposition it may be objected that reference is made to the miracle by an inspired prophet. Habakkuk says, "The sun and moon stood still in their habitation" (iii. 11). But it must be remembered that the prophet himself is not writing prose, but one of the most spirited and sublime odes ever penned; and not only that he is himself writing poetry, but is also quoting poetry. If we take the eleventh verse

literally, we must take the preceding verse in the same way: what, then, are we to make of

“The deep uttered his voice,
And lifted up his hands on high?”

Some Jewish writers think that the standing still of the sun and moon is only a poetical phrase to express a long summer's day. Josephus says, “Now, that the day was lengthened at this time, and was longer than ordinary, is expressed in the books laid up in the Temple.”—(*Ant.*, Book V. chap. 1.) This view is in advance of the other; but it does not countenance the standing still of the heavenly bodies.

Should the reader not accept the explanation suggested (not asserted), he need not feel shut up to the popular opinion that the sun and the moon actually stood still. There is an alternative with which he may be satisfied. Instead of “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon,” &c., Dr. Hussey translates the words, “‘Sunlight, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and moonlight in the valley of Ajalon! And the sunlight stood still, and the moonlight stayed’ (*by the effect of miraculous refraction*). . . . ‘So the sunlight stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.’”—*Dr. Hussey's Com.*

The following extract, giving the opinion of

the late Dean Milman, D.D., will be read with interest:—"Many learned writers, whom to suspect of hostility to revealed religion would be the worst uncharitableness, have doubted either the reality or the extent of this miracle. Some have supposed the miracle only apparent, and have imagined a preternatural refraction of the sun's rays after it had really sunk below the horizon. The words, 'about a whole day,' during which the sun hasted not to go down, they translate, 'after the day was finished.' Others conceive that the whole is a highly wrought poetical passage from the Book of Jasher (which there is good reason to believe was the great collection of national lyrics), and hence, according to the genius of Hebrew poetry, abounding with the most daring apostrophes, and delighting in figures drawn from the heavenly bodies. Those who contend for the literal acceptance of the miracle urge, as its obvious purpose, the giving a death-blow to the prevailing superstition of the country—the worship of the sun and moon. Nor can it be denied that there is something astonishingly sublime in supposing the deities of the conquered people thus arrested in their career, and forced to witness the discomfiture and contribute to the extirpation of their worshippers."

In a note the learned Dean adds, "I have no scruple in avowing my opinion that it is pure

poetry. It is given as a quotation from the Book of Jasher a book of pure poetry—a book of odes, hymns, or brief narrative poems. It is remarkable that to this miracle, the most stupendous of all, there is no allusion in the poetic books of the Old Testament.” *—*History of the Jews*, vol. i. p. 223.

Oriental extravagance is not confined to the region of poetry; it obtrudes itself even into history. Timour Beg, the notorious Tartar, was told that “at his birth the planets quitted their orbits; and the title of Sahib Keraun, *Lord of auspicious conjunctions*, was bestowed on the young prince, whose wonderful destiny could change the laws of heaven itself.”—*Sullivan’s Conquerors of India*, p. 150.

Lightfoot speaks of “the Book of Jasher as a human history, cited as Paul cites heathen poets and Talmudic doctors.”—(*Works*, vol. ii. p. 35.) By adopting this conclusion, one great objection of scientific men is neutralised. In Jewish phraseology, we “remove a mountain.”

SECTION III.—THE BOOK OF JOB.†

Of this book Thomas Carlyle says, “There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of

* Dr. Milman appears to have overlooked the passage in Hab. iii. 11.

† See Note C, p. 472.

it, of equal literary merit. I call it one of the grandest things ever written with pen."—*Works*, vol. xii. p. 59.

As the great object of this essay is not to point out the beauties, but to remove the difficulties of Scripture, we shall confine our remarks to this our immediate task. A careful examination of the construction of this book will help us better to understand it. It is evidently a dramatic performance. The first two chapters, written in prose, may be regarded as the prologue. At the second verse of the third chapter, the dramatic portion of the book commences, and is continued between Job and his three friends until the close of the thirty-first chapter. Here, a pause having ensued, Elihu, who had hitherto been merely a listener, interposes modestly, but with great decision. At the thirty-eighth chapter God himself is represented as answering Job out of the whirlwind. The afflicted man is humbled at the presence of the Holy One, confesses his sin, and "repents in dust and ashes." The last chapter contains the account of his restoration to more than his original prosperity.

Some have asserted that the whole book is fictitious; others that the whole is strictly historical. It would probably be more correct to believe that it is based upon truth, but em-

bellished with fiction, the whole recorded in the most exquisite poetry.

The first two chapters, which we regard as the prologue, are introductory to the drama itself. They are written in prose; yet this appears to be the prose of a fictitious parable rather than the prose of precise history. The character and the wealth of Job; his sudden and overwhelming calamities; his patience; the visits of his friends; their disputations; his contrition, and consequent restoration—these are the *facts* which the inspired poet commemorates; but he does this as a poet, not as an historian. The account given of the conversation between God and Satan is no more historic than the conversation between the rich man in hell and Abraham in heaven (Luke xvi.). Both alike are fictitious, yet both are appropriate, one being the language of poetry, the other the language of parable, and each recognised as such. What is termed the machinery of poets is used in the commencement of the Book of Job. The statement, at the close of the second chapter, that his three friends sat down by him seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him, is very beautiful as a fiction, expressive of their deep sympathy with their suffering friend when “they saw that his grief was very great,” but we can hardly believe that it records simply a fact.

As a further proof of the partially unhistorical character of the greater portion of this book, we note that the debate between Job and his friends is carried on in Hebrew verse constructed in parallelisms, after the model of Lamech's ode, already noticed, and that utterance is given by all the speakers to the most sublime thoughts in the most sublime language. It is obvious, therefore, that the record of these speeches must have proceeded, not from the pen of history, but from that of poetry. We might as well regard Milton's report of the discourses of the fallen angels in Pandemonium as accurate, instead of being wholly fictitious. Men never did debate in poetry. The arguments they may have been supposed to use may be gathered by a master poet, may be put into verse, and embellished with all the beauty of poetic imagery. He may also introduce additional arguments of his own to make his work more generally useful ; but this liberty, allowed to the poet and to the author of parables, is denied to the faithful historian.

This poetical debate between Job and his three friends is continued from the third chapter to the close of the thirty-first. The first few verses of the thirty-second chapter are in prose ; and they introduce to us another personage, Elihu, who, though present during the debate, had, from feelings of modesty, refrained from taking any part

in the contest. What we have mainly to notice is that he adopts the same style of delivering his sentiments in Hebrew parallelisms: this is the more remarkable as his discourse is far less imaginative than the speeches of the preceding speakers, and much more strictly argumentative.

Elihu having concluded his discourse, and the five disputants being silent, if not convinced, they were all startled by a voice from heaven, and their attention was riveted: "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,

Who is this that darkeneth counsel

By words without knowledge?" (Job xxxviii. 1, 2.)

Through four chapters of the book the Almighty is represented as speaking to Job in Hebrew verse. Can this be received as historical? Is it not much more suitable to regard this as the invention of the inspired poet? By this happy conception, all the events of the preceding narrative are brought to a most sublime climax.

This Divine discourse, addressed to Job, must be distinguished from all the preceding discourses uttered by the several personages. Unquestionably it must be received as inspired truth, having been written by an inspired man, and also as expressing sentiments attributed to the God of truth. The speeches of the five human debaters were likewise

recorded by an inspired penman ; but they come to us as the utterances of fallible mortals, and we have the testimony of God himself that Job's three friends had not "spoken of Him the thing that is right" (Job xlii. 7). Job, also, had to confess that he had sinned with his lips (Job xl. 4, 5). If we assume that the whole book is inspired, the malicious speeches of Satan must be referred to the same Divine agency as the words of the Almighty!

The grand lessons taught to the human family by this one book sufficiently attest its Divine origin. Job's sufferings ; his patience ; the anguish of his perplexed spirit whilst "feeling after God, if haply he might find Him ;" his firm resolve when driven almost to desperation—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (xiii. 15)—have for many ages whispered in the ears of suffering humanity lessons of Divine instruction and comfort, and will continue to do so as long as suffering on earth exists. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job," says the apostle, "and have seen the end of the Lord ; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James v. 11). Surely, if the sufferings were great, the glory of being such an instructor of mankind is more than a compensation.

SECTION IV.—THE BOOK OF JONAH.

This book, like that of Job, is composed partly in prose, and partly in verse; but whereas the latter book is mainly verse, this, with the exception of the second chapter, is wholly prose. In reading this chapter an incongruity is apparent. As arranged in our English Bible the ode commencing with the second verse of the second chapter is styled the prayer of Jonah “which he prayed to the Lord his God, out of the fish’s belly” (ii. 1). Yet there is not a word of prayer in it. It is a thanksgiving ode, which he commences by referring to a prayer offered previously :—

“I cried, by reason of my distress,
Unto Jehovah, and He hath heard me.”

At the conclusion of the ode we read that “the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah on the dry land.” Dr. Boothroyd maintains that these words should follow the first verse, and he thus renders the two : “Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God from the belly of the fish; and Jehovah commanded the fish, and he cast forth Jonah on the dry land.” Then follows the ode, which is one of thanksgiving for his miraculous deliverance.

It has been thought by some that as the Book of Job is partly historic, and partly parabolic and

poetic, these elements may be recognised in the composition of the Book of Jonah. The command of God ordering the prophet to go to Nineveh and to preach its impending destruction; his reluctance to obey this command; his efforts to shun the task, overcome by Divine interposition; the eventual discharge of his commission; the repentance of the Ninevites, and their consequent forgiveness; the vexation of the selfish prophet, and the reproof of his conduct by his Divine Master—all these constitute the historic element in the book. His being swallowed by a fish; his continuing in its belly three days and three nights; the statement that “the Lord spake unto the fish,” which (more obedient than the prophet) “vomited out Jonah upon the dry land”—these they regard as partaking more of the parabolic character than of the historic.

Against this the words of our Saviour are urged as incompatible with such interpretation. When the Pharisees requested of Him a sign, He said, “There shall no sign be given to this evil and adulterous generation, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. xii. 39, 40). It must be admitted that these words imply not only that a miracle was actually performed, but also that

this miracle was typical, pointing to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus—the two facts which form the basis of Christianity.

It must be borne in mind that the mission of Jonah was peculiar and unprecedented. No other prophet had ever been commanded to proclaim the word of Jehovah to the heathen. The duty was repulsive to all his Jewish prejudices; for he, with his fellow-countrymen, regarded “the nations of the earth as dogs.” Besides, he might apprehend from idolaters the fate which too often befell the faithful prophets even in Israel. That he should be plunged into such affliction as made him, in the language of David, say, “All thy billows and thy waves passed over me” (compare Jonah ii. 3 with Ps. xlii. 7), might have been necessary to enforce his obedience; whilst his deliverance from such unexampled peril might inspire him with confidence to deliver his message, and to assure the Ninevites that the Power by which he had been delivered was the Power by which their destruction was foretold. This may account for the remarkable effect of his preaching. That a stranger should go through the streets of the mightiest city in the world proclaiming, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown;” that this messenger of wrath should be listened to with reverence; that the people should receive it as the word of God; that the King should come

down from his throne, put on sackcloth, and enjoin a strict fast throughout the whole city, and this with the hope that "God may turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not"—all this is unaccountable unless accomplished by some extraordinary Divine interposition.

The difficulty felt by the Scripture student is how Jonah could be preserved three days and three nights alive in the belly of the fish. But it should be kept in mind that to Omnipotence all things are equally easy. The preservation of Jonah was not more remarkable than the preservation of the three Hebrew confessors whom Nebuchadnezzar cast into the fiery furnace. He who created the elements can control them. All things are still "upheld by the word of his power" (Heb. i. 3), and "all are his servants" (Ps. cxix. 91). The "fire and air, snow and vapour, and the stormy wind fulfil His word" (Ps. cxlviii. 8).

Great as the real difficulties are, these have been considerably magnified. It has been urged that the throat of the whale is too narrow to allow him to swallow a man; but the history states that it was "a great fish" that God prepared to receive the prophet, and our Saviour's words are thus translated by several modern critics. Bishop Jebb renders the passage, "As Jonas was in the *cavity* of the whale three days and three nights," &c.; and he remarks that "a safe and practical

asylum is afforded, not indeed in the stomach, but in another cavity of the whale ; the throat is large, and provided with a bag or intestine, so considerable in size that whales frequently take into it *two* of their young when weak, especially during a tempest. In this vessel there are two vents, which serve for inspiration and respiration ; and here, in all probability, Jonah was preserved: not indeed without miracle, but with that *economy of miracle* so frequently exemplified in Scripture. This receptacle may be accounted a sort of air-vessel, and sufficiently answers to the *χοιλια* in St. Matthew, which I have rendered *cavity*.”—*Jebb's Sacred Literature*, p. 178.

The importance of the miracle is enhanced by its typical signification. As Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites by his reappearing alive on the earth after having been entombed for three days and three nights in the *cavity* of the whale, so should the Son of man be to the Jewish people by his resurrection from the dead. The type closely corresponds with the contemplated sacrifice of Isaac, who, after three days from the time that the execution of the sentence had commenced, was received by faithful Abraham raised from the dead “as in a figure” (Heb. xi. 19), or parabolic representation. Both histories typify the same fundamental truths—the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. One type appeared in the

patriarchal age, the other in the prophetic. The antitype is found in the Gospel.

The mission of Jonah, however, is significant of the great purpose of God, that in the fulness of time the Gentiles should enjoy the blessing of salvation. He preaches to them the word of God; they repent and cry to the Lord for mercy; He hears, and spares the doomed city. About nine centuries after, "Simon, the son of Jonas," is commissioned to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles in Cæsarea (see Acts. x.). A miracle was necessary to constrain the reluctant prophet; and a vision was necessary to satisfy the too scrupulous apostle. When convinced of his duty he hesitates no longer. He starts from the same place that Jonah did—from Joppa; he proclaims, not destruction, as the prophet did, but the glad tidings of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts x. 39, 40); and, to the great astonishment of the apostle and of his Jewish companions, "the Holy Ghost fell on all them who heard the word." "The keys of the kingdom of heaven" having been committed to St. Peter, he, by preaching the Gospel, opened the door of faith unto the Gentile world, and thus accomplished what had been merely signified by the mission of Jonah to the men of Nineveh.

Whatever difficulties may be felt in this extraordinary history, one thing is certain—it bears

upon its pages the broad seal of Divine inspiration. The tender compassion of "the God and Father of all" contrasts wonderfully with the narrowness and selfishness of his servant. The Divine forbearance exercised towards the disobedient prophet; the more than human tenderness expressed in the reproof, "Thou hadst pity on the gourd, for the which thou hadst not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern their right hand from their left hand; and also much cattle?"—this tender compassion was of no Jewish origin. Nothing could be more contrary to their most cherished feelings. As well might you expect to "gather grapes of thorns" as such sentiments of universal love from the most exclusive of all nations. In this history of Jonah the universal Father proclaims emphatically the brotherhood of the whole human family, and illustrates to us how we ought to be "followers of God, as dear children, and to walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us" (Eph. v. 1, 2). This is truly "a sign from heaven, that we may see and believe;" and one that, whilst it proves a stumbling-block to the proud and sceptical, will carry conviction and impart confidence to the humble and teachable

disciple. The accuracy of the *events* recorded may be questioned, but the truth of the *doctrines* so beautifully illustrated cannot be either disputed or dispensed with. Were the Book of Jonah expunged from the sacred record, the Bible would be despoiled of one of its very brightest jewels.

SECTION V.—DAVID'S LAST ODE.

The great advantage of the metrical arrangement and the force of the parallelism may be seen by carefully examining what in the authorised version are termed "the last words of David" (2 Sam. xxiii. 1—7). The following is Dr. Boothroyd's version of this beautiful ode:—

"Now these, though later,* are the words of David.

Thus saith David the son of Jesse ;

The man who was highly exalted saith ;

The anointed of the God of Jacob ;

The pleasant psalmist of Israel.

The Spirit of Jehovah speaketh by me,

And his word is on my tongue.

The God of Israel hath said unto me ;

To me the Rock of Israel hath promised

A just Ruler over mankind,

Who will rule in the fear of God.

* *i.e.* later than the preceding ode. This and Ps. lxxii. were probably the last of David's poetical compositions.

As the morning light when the sun ariseth ;
A morning cloudless and resplendent ;
As the grass from the earth after rain ;—
Is not my house thus with God ?
For with me He hath made an everlasting covenant,
Wisely ordered in all points and sure.
Truly in this is all my salvation ;
And my every desire will He not accomplish ?
But lawless men, all of them,
Are like thorns to be thrust away
(For they cannot be taken with the hand,
But the man who would cut them up
Must have an axe and a spear-shaft),
And to be burned, in the place, with fire.”

The reader will notice that this version, which is sustained by that of Dr. Hussey, differs materially from the authorised version. It contains a striking prophecy of the Messiah, who was to be “made of the seed of David according to the flesh,” and to be “a just Ruler over mankind,” and of whom the royal psalmist had foretold, “All kings shall fall down before Him ; all nations shall serve Him” (Ps. lxxii. 11). Having in this Psalm described in such glowing terms the glory of Messiah’s kingdom, he closes it by saying, “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.” So in this ode, containing his “later” or “last words,” he dwells upon the same glorious hope, founded on the “everlasting covenant, wisely ordered in all points and sure.”

The close of the ode appears to refer to the destruction of the "lawless men" who said, "We will not have this Man to reign over us," who rejected the King whom God had set on his holy hill of Zion, and who with base truculency declared to Pilate, "We have no king but Cæsar." In a note on the closing words of this ode Dr. Boothroyd asks, "Is there not here a reference not only to the punishment of the wicked in general, but to the lawless, wicked Israelites, who, when the *just King* should come, would not submit to his law? The metaphor, in this view, has peculiar force and propriety. As thorns are cut up and burned with fire in the place where they grew, so shall these sinners be cut off and consumed in their own land."

Dr. Hussey renders the last line, "And they shall be utterly burned with fire on the spot;" and he remarks that this was "the punishment inflicted upon Jerusalem by Cæsar, for whom she had rejected her spiritual King."—*Commentary*.

The misapprehension of this portion of Scripture has led many to cherish a feeling which, to say the least, is very questionable. Expressed in words, this feeling is, "Although my children and my household generally are enemies to God by wicked works, yet I am all right, for He hath made with *me* an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." This selfish spirit is utterly

opposed to the spirit of Christianity. How different the feeling of St. Paul, expressed in reference to his persecutors ! “ For I could wish that I myself were made as one accursed, after the manner of Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh ” (Rom. ix. 3, Boothroyd’s version).

SECTION VI.—POETRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

The New Testament is not without its poetry, although it occurs much less frequently than in the Old, from which most of it appears to have been derived. The beautiful song of the Virgin Mary (Luke i. 46) corresponds strikingly with the spirited song of Hannah (1 Sam. ii.). Each is characteristic of the dispensation under which each was written. The meekness and gentleness, the humility and quiet joy, which breathe through the song of the holy Virgin contrast very favourably with the triumphant tone in which Hannah exults over her adversaries who had “ provoked her sore.” A careful comparison of the two thanksgiving odes will well repay those who study them. There appears to be a congruity in the mother of the Great Deliverer choosing, as the model of her song of thanksgiving, the song of that mother in

Israel who from his birth had dedicated her son, the offspring of her prayers, to the Lord, and who became the deliverer of Israel from their oppressive foes; who founded the schools of the prophets; and who was honoured by God to anoint, as king over his people, David, the great type of Him who was destined in his own person to fulfil the words of the prophet, "And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one." (Zech. xiv. 9).

The song of Zacharias, which he uttered when "filled with the Holy Ghost," is one of exquisite beauty. It does not appear, like that of the Virgin, to have been formed on any existing model; but it seems to breathe the very purest spirit of "all the holy prophets which have been since the world began" (Luke i. 70). It anticipates the song of the angels—

"Glory in the highest heavens be to God;
And on earth peace, good-will towards men"
(Luke ii. 14, Boothroyd's version;)

for it commences with ascription of praise to God—

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel:
For He hath visited and redeemed his people"—

and it closes by declaring his benevolent purposes to mankind:—

“Through the tender mercy of our God,
Whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,
To give light to them that sit in darkness and the
shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace”
(Luke i. 68—79).

In these closing words Zacharias appears to have in view the prophecy of Isaiah (xlix. 6)—

“I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles,
To be my salvation to the end of the earth.”

The brief song of the venerable Simeon transcends both the others alike in pathos and in comprehensiveness. In the simple narrative of the evangelist we see the old man, who had long been “waiting for the consolation of Israel,” coming into the Temple, his face beaming with hallowed joy, and his steps animated by the revelation made to him, “that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” He takes up into his arms the infant Saviour, and blesses God, and says—

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart
In peace, according to thy word :
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all
people ;
A light to lighten the Gentiles,
And the glory of thy people Israel ”
(Luke ii. 28—32).

These sentiments were suggested, probably, by the words of the evangelical prophet—

“I will give thee for a covenant to the people ;
And a *light to the Gentiles*” (Isa. xlii. 6).

And again :—

“I will give in Zion salvation ;
To Israel I will give my glory ”
(Isa. xlvi. 13, Lowth’s version).

The remarks of Bishop Jebb on these three songs, each celebrating the coming of our Lord in the flesh, will be read with interest and advantage. Having stated that “where the Virgin ends Zacharias begins,” he thus proceeds :—“It may now be added that where Zacharias ends Simeon begins. These three favoured individuals all spake as the Spirit gave them utterance ; and matters have been so ordered, that each subsequent advances upon each preceding speaker, not only in the dignity, but in the chronological order of their respective subjects. The Virgin gives vent to her *immediate* feelings ; and her subject closes with the birth of the Messiah. Zacharias opens a *prospective*, though limited field of vision ; he begins with the gracious visitation of Messiah’s birth, and ends with the guidance of the Jewish people into the way of peace. But Simeon altogether passes by the

first gathering of Jewish converts ; he commences with the removal of the veil from the understanding and affections of the Gentiles, and concludes with that final manifestation of Divine glory, when, after the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in, all Israel shall be saved.” —*Jebb's Sacred Literature*, p. 420.

In many parts of the New Testament we find extracts from the poetical books of the Old : in all these the metrical form should be retained. In the song of praise which burst forth from the assembled Christians (recorded Acts iv.) there is a quotation from the second Psalm :—

“ Why did the heathen rage,
And the people imagine vain things?
The kings of the earth stood up,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against Jehovah, and against his Anointed.”

The exordium of this song is almost in the words used by Hezekiah, when praying for deliverance from the Assyrian army (compare Acts iv. 24 with Isa. xxxvii. 16). This affords an additional illustration of the fact that the language of the New Testament is very frequently drawn from the Old.

“ This noble supplicatory hymn,” says Bishop Jebb, “ poured forth at once by the whole Christian people, under the immediate influence of the

Holy Spirit, is worthy of that inspiration from whence it flowed. No one part of it can be deemed inferior to another; the same sacred vein of poetry animates the whole; and yet, amidst all this poetic fervour, we may discern much technical nicety of construction.”—*Sacred Literature*, p. 134.

The Book of Revelation, containing as it does constant allusion to the prophecies and other poetical parts of the Old Testament, abounds in poetry; so much so, that some able critics think that the whole ought to be metrically arranged. Michaelis says of it, “The Apocalypse has something in it which enchants and insensibly inspires the reader with the sublime spirit of the author. . . . A great part of the imagery is borrowed from the ancient prophets; but the imitation is, for the most part, more sublime and more magnificent than the original, which is particularly true of what is taken from Ezekiel.”—*Michaelis's Introduction*, vol. iv. p. 533.

The song of those “who had gotten the victory over the beast,” and described as “the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,” bears a very close resemblance to a portion of the eighty-sixth Psalm. One part is almost in the very words of the psalmist. The victor worshippers sing—

“ All nations shall come and worship before thee,
For thy judgments are made manifest ”
(Rev. xv. 4).

The psalmist's words are—

“ All nations whom thou hast made
Shall come and worship before thee, O Lord ;
And shall glorify thy name ” (Ps. lxxxvi. 9).

Bishop Jebb maintains that our Lord, in his discourses, frequently adopted the parallelism, and that the same form may be traced in the writings of his apostles. One or two examples will enable the reader to trace for himself this peculiar form of expression, harmonizing as it does with the sententious style so much cherished by Oriental nations. The following is an instance of a couplet :—

“ Not that which cometh into the mouth defileth the
man ;
But that which goeth forth from the mouth, this
defileth the man ” (Matt. xv. 11).

The following is a specimen of two triplets :—

“ Ask, and it shall be given you ;
Seek, and ye shall find ;
Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
For every one who asketh, receiveth ;
And every one who seeketh, findeth ;
And to every one who knocketh, it shall be opened ”
(Matt. vii. 7, 8).

The reader will notice that the first line of the first triplet corresponds with the first line of the second triplet—

“ Ask, and it shall be given you ;
For every one who asketh receiveth ”—

and that the same correspondence is manifest in the second and the third lines of each stanza.

In the following quatrain the lines alternate :—

“ If ye keep my commandments,
Ye shall abide in my love ;
Even as I have kept my Father’s commandments,
And abide in his love ” (John xv. 10).

One more quotation from our Lord’s discourse will suffice :—

“ Come unto me, all ye who labour, and are burdened ;
And I will give you rest ;
Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ;
For I am meek and lowly in heart ;
And ye shall find rest unto your souls ;
For my yoke is easy, and my burden light ”
(Matt. xi. 28—30).

In these six lines the first and the last correspond, the second and the fifth, the third and the fourth.

The two following examples are from the writings of St. Paul :—

“ Behold therefore the gentleness
And the severity of God :
Towards those who have fallen, severity ;
But towards thee, gentleness ” (Rom. xi. 22).

“ But ye are sanctified,
But ye are justified,
In the name of the Lord Jesus ;
And by the Spirit of our God ”
(1 Cor. vi. 11).

By the correspondence of the first with the fourth line, the apostle asserts that we are sanctified by the Spirit of our God ; and by that of the second line with the third he declares that we are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. Thus the distinctive work of each Divine Agent in the justification and in the sanctification of believers is consistently maintained.

From St. Peter's writings the Bishop quotes the following :—

“ Add to your faith, virtue ;
And to virtue, knowledge ;
And to knowledge, temperance ;
And to temperance, patience ;
And to patience, piety ;
And to piety, brotherly kindness ;
And to brotherly kindness, charity ”
(2 Peter i. 5—7).

From the writings of St. John the following is selected :—

“ Love not the world ;
Neither the things of the world :
If any one love the world,
The love of the Father is not in him ”
(1 John ii. 15).

Many examples from the writings of St. James are given in Jebb's “ Sacred Literature,” a volume deeply interesting to all who delight in the study of Scripture. With one more quotation we will conclude : it is taken from the close of the Apocalypse :—

“ He who acts unjustly, let him act unjustly still ;
And he who acts filthily, let him act filthily still ;
And he who is just, let him be justified still ;
And he who is holy, let him be sanctified still ”
(Rev. xxii. 11).

The Bishop's comment on these lines shows great critical discernment, and will be read with pleasure :—“ That there is in each couplet of this stanza a *progressive meaning* cannot, I presume, be reasonably questioned. *Filthiness* evidently rises in the scale of turpitude above *injustice* or *unrighteousness* ; and, from the rules of Hebrew poetry, and indeed of all measured composition, *holiness* or *sanctification*, which is antithetically opposed to *filthiness*, must in like manner rise in the scale of moral excellence above *justice* or *righteousness* or *justification*, which is antitheti-

cally opposed to *injustice*: the first couplet, then, presents *two degrees* of moral evil, and the second couplet *two degrees* of moral goodness. Again, the participial form on the bad side indicates an evil form of action; the adjectival form on the good side indicates an inherent principle or quality of virtue. And lastly, the active voice of the verbs on the bad side would seem to attribute all human wickedness to man's own agency, and the passive voice of the verbs on the good side to ascribe all human excellence to some derivative communicated power—that is, manifestly, to the efficacious grace of God.”—*Jebb's Sacred Literature*, p. 329.



CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

“ We conclude that virtue must be the happiness, and vice the misery of every creature ; and that regularity and order and right cannot but prevail finally in a universe under God’s government.”—BISHOP BUTLER.

TO remove difficulties and to correct errors by establishing sound principles of biblical interpretation is the direct object of the preceding essay. Success, however partial, in such a work will amply repay the labour it has involved. A more positive good than the correction of errors may, however, result from our investigations. As those who dig among the ruins of ancient cities for the mere purpose of removing the accumulated rubbish of ages not unfrequently discover, deep below the surface, treasures of great value—jewels that had not sparkled in the light for ages—so the result of our researches may be to bring into prominence some grand Scripture truths which may have been partially

concealed, if not wholly covered, by the accumulated errors of many centuries. If the views advocated in the preceding pages harmonize with "the true sayings of God," a much brighter future for the human family may be anticipated than that usually held forth. Instead of a gloomy foreboding of the destruction of all things, our minds will be fixed hopefully on "the restitution of all things." We shall see that this is the grand subject of "which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts iii. 21). It is this "restitution of all things," by the universal reign of "the King of righteousness and peace," on which the apostles delight to expatiate. In all his Epistles St. Paul speaks of these things (2 Peter iii. 16). In not one of them does he assert that the heavens and the earth will be destroyed by fire. All that is unrighteous, whether in Church or State, must be destroyed, because it is opposed to Christ's righteous government. His laws are to be written on the hearts of all men; "every knee is to bow to Him, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii. 10, 11). The result of this will be, not the destruction of the material universe, but a response to the psalmist's invocation—

"Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad"
(Ps. xvi. 11).

The fall of man, through the malice and falsehood of the wicked one, and his restoration by the love and the truth of "the Holy One of God," is the grand epic of the Bible. It is the unfolding and development of the first prophecy, uttered by the Divine Judge when he pronounced the serpent's doom: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. iii. 15). Ever since the expulsion of our first parents from Eden, the conflict between good and evil has been going on. For many ages the prospect of victory appeared on the side of the wicked one. He was manifestly "the god of this world" (2 Cor. iv. 4). His dominion is described by the apostle as "the power of darkness" (Col. i. 13). During his reign "darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people" (Isa. lx. 2). The knowledge of the one living and true God was almost extinguished. But this empire, like all others founded on falsehood and iniquity, was doomed to perish. The time approached when the serpent's head was to be bruised. Christ, "the Seed of the woman," came into our world for this express purpose, "that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John iii. 8). He himself declared, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in

darkness" (John xii. 46). Shortly after the commencement of his ministry He declared to his disciples, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke x. 18). By this declaration we are to understand that our Lord clearly foresaw the total destruction of "the power of darkness." The supremacy hitherto exerted over the minds of men by superstition, by idolatry and all its associated impurities, was to be for ever destroyed by the preaching of Christ's truth; and He whom God had anointed to be "King on the holy hill of Zion" (Ps. ii. 6) was to take possession of what had been given to Him by the Father—the "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him;" and, as his throne was based upon truth and righteousness, it was declared "his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. vii. 14).

The misinterpretation of this dream of Daniel has thrown a deep shade over one of the brightest prospects ever presented to the eye of suffering humanity. The sublime description of "the Ancient of days," enthroned for judgment on guilty nations, has been interpreted as referring to the great day of final account; whereas the context proves that the vision referred, as Dr. A. Clarke says, to the judgment "which He was

to execute on the *fourth beast*, the Roman empire, and the little boasting horn which is a part of the fourth beast, and must fall when the other falls.”—(*Com.*) The judgments to be executed, whether on corrupt ecclesiastical establishments or tyrannical civil governments, are only preliminary to the glorious reign of Him in whom “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. xxii. 18). Instead of joyfully anticipating this universal blessedness, multitudes of Christians fix their minds on what they falsely imagine Daniel’s vision portrays—“a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. x. 27). True, the indications of judgment are conspicuous; the vision reveals “One like unto the Son of man, who came with the clouds of heaven” (v. 13), taking vengeance on those who said, “We will not have this Man to reign over us;” and this part of the vision was fulfilled when Christ, “the Lord’s Anointed,” “sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city” (Matt. xxii. 7). This awful judgment, so solemnly foretold by our Lord, demonstrated to the Jewish people, and to the whole world, that He had been exalted to the right hand of God, there to sit “until his enemies should be made his footstool” (Ps. cx. 1). The judgment was indeed terrible; it was unprecedented. It was,

as foretold, the "great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world unto this time, no, NOR EVER SHALL BE" * (Matt. xxiv. 21). But this greatest of judgments was preliminary to the greatest of blessings. The old Jerusalem was destroyed, in order that the new Jerusalem might descend from heaven, and that her citizens, born from above, might, in a spiritual sense, "be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth." The Temple built by Herod was consumed with fire, and not one of its massive stones left on another, in order that the spiritual temple, built by "the Saviour of all men," might be erected, and that "all nations might flow unto it" (Isa. ii. 2). The glorious prophecy given to the disheartened Jews, when building their second Temple, will receive an ever-increasing fulfilment, until it be completed in the universal reign of Messiah :—

"Behold ! the man, whose name is the BRANCH ; †
Even He shall branch up out of his place,
And He shall build the temple of Jehovah ;
Even He shall build the temple of Jehovah ;
And He himself shall receive the glory ;
And shall sit and rule upon his throne ;

* Those who talk and write about the great tribulation *coming* may ponder these words of our Lord.

† "From the root of Jesse" (Isa. xi. 1).

And He shall be a priest upon his throne ;
And the counsel of peace shall be between both of
them ” * (Zech. vi. 12, Boothroyd’s version).

In harmony with this prophecy, the psalmist records the Divine declaration concerning Christ, “Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek ” (Ps. cx. 4). Our Lord unites, in his own person, the priestly and the regal offices. As a Priest He makes atonement and offers intercession for sinners, and thus introduces them into his kingdom. As a King, “the King of righteousness,” He rules in their hearts; and, as his “sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness ” (Heb. i. 8), his kingdom will be ever extending until the word of prophecy receive its glorious fulfilment, “All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name ” (Ps. lxvi. 4).

We may feel assured that the conflict between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent will end in no doubtful result. The struggle has been, and still may be, very sore and painfully protracted, but the victory will be decisive. The powers of darkness will be defeated at every point, and “the Captain of our salvation ” will universally triumph. This both prophets and apostles unite to declare. Christ, the Lord’s

* *i.e.* between the regal and the sacerdotal offices.

Anointed, "must reign, until He hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. xv. 25). As the result of his atoning sacrifice, it is foretold that "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee" (Ps. xxii. 27). It is predicted of the Messiah, "All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him;" and the reason assigned for this universal homage is in striking contrast to the character of all earthly dominion, "For He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper" (Ps. lxxii. 11, 12). Again, we read, "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name" (Ps. lxxxvi. 9). The invocation, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands" (Ps. c. 1), implies that the inhabitants of all lands have been brought to know Him who is the God and Father of all; that they enjoy peace with Him through the one Mediator between God and man; that they love Him, and hence can rejoice in Him, and can "serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with singing."

When the laws of Christ are thus written on the hearts of all men, when his truth pervades and influences all classes, then will be fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel, "The saints of the Most

High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever” (Dan. vii. 18). All who obey Christ’s laws, who labour to make them known, and who illustrate them by their daily conduct and conversation, may be said, even now, to sit with Him on his throne (Rev. iii. 21): they are his ministers to enforce the laws of his spiritual kingdom—the new creation.

That the closing vision of St. John, recorded in Rev. xxii., refers not, as is generally supposed, to the heavenly state, but to the ultimate condition of the Church on earth, will appear from a careful examination of the record. The apostle sees “a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” This is the symbol of that Divine truth which Christ was commissioned by the Father to proclaim to the world (John xii. 49). St. John sees, also, the tree of life, and tells us that “the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” The vision, therefore, has regard to nations existing at some time on our earth, and their condition must be such as to require healing. The remedy, having been provided by Infinite Wisdom and Almighty Power, must be fully adequate to accomplish the benevolent purposes of the Great Physician. When true spiritual health has been restored to

the human family, when all shall have been renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him who created them (Col. iii. 10), then "there shall be no more curse;" the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be the only power recognised; his servants shall serve him; they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. Then, and probably not until then, shall we apprehend the full meaning of the apostle's words, "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John iii. 2).

The extraordinary genius of the great Napoleon, although sadly misdirected, enabled him, in his banishment and seclusion in St. Helena, to discern more of the nature of Christ's kingdom than many theologians whose lives have been devoted to the study of the Gospel. He spoke to Montholon the following memorable words:—"I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man! The religion of Christ is a mystery which subsists by its own force, and proceeds from a mind which is not a human mind. We find in it a marked individuality, which originated a train of words and maxims unknown before. Jesus borrowed nothing from our knowledge. He exhibited himself the perfect example of his precepts. Jesus is not a philosopher; for his proofs are his miracles, and from the first his disciples adored Him. Learning and philosophy

are of no use to salvation ; and Jesus came into the world to reveal the mysteries of heaven and the laws of the spirit. Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and myself have founded empires. But upon what did we rest the creation of our genius ? Upon FORCE ! Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon LOVE ; and at this moment millions of men would die for Him. I die before my time, and my body will be given back to earth to become food for worms. Such is the fate of him who has been called the great Napoleon ! What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved, and adored, and which is extended over the whole earth ! ”

Who can read these thrilling words without cherishing the hope that the exile of St. Helena had been brought to the feet of that Divine Saviour whose superiority he so deeply felt, and so freely acknowledged ?

A very striking correspondence may be traced in the history of the first great conqueror of ancient times, and that of the last great conqueror of modern times. Nebuchadnezzar founded his empire on *force*. As the prophet Daniel declared to his successor, “ All people, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him : whom he would he slew ; and whom he would he kept alive ; and whom he would he set up ; and whom

he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened with pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him" (Dan. v. 19, 20). When humbled by seven years of degradation,* and restored to his regal dignity, he issues a proclamation in which he narrates God's dealings with him, and declares as the result, "I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation;" and he concludes this remarkable proclamation thus: "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those who walk in pride He is able to abase" (Dan. iv. 34 to end).

The empire of the first Napoleon was erected on the same sandy foundation as that of his great predecessor in conquest. Both were based upon force and unrighteousness, and both ended in ruin. Such has been the history of all intermediate empires founded on the same destructive principles. They *have* perished; and we may predict of all earthly empires founded on the same basis, "they *shall* perish." The confessions of the first and those of the last great conqueror form a strik-

* About the same time as Napoleon spent at Elba and St. Helena.

ing commentary on the declarations of Holy Scripture. Those of Napoleon are the more touching. Nebuchadnezzar adores the almighty *power* of the King of heaven; the exiled Emperor points us to the *love* of the meek and lowly Saviour, declares that on *love* his empire is founded, and feels his own "deep misery" intensified by contemplating "the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved, and adored, and which is extended over the whole earth."

Here we may profitably meditate on the words addressed by Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar in explanation of his dream: "Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the King what shall come to pass hereafter; and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (Dan. ii. 45). All subsequent history, from Nebuchadnezzar to Napoleon, is but an illustration of the principles implied and the events foreshadowed in the monarch's dreams, and predicted in the prophet's symbolic words. "The stone cut out of the mountain without hands" will continue to strike, with ever-increasing force, all hostile powers, until it become "a great mountain, and fill the whole earth;" *i.e.* until all earthly governments, both

civil and religious, shall be subordinated to the King who shall "reign in righteousness," and whose "princes shall execute judgment" (Isa. xxxii. 1).

Our Lord has taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven." This justifies his servants in cherishing the full assurance that the time will come when the will of God shall be done upon earth as it is done in heaven—perfectly and universally; otherwise our Saviour has commanded us to pray for what He knew would never take place, and this notwithstanding the assurance given to his disciples, "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive, and ye shall have them" (Mark xi. 24). Of course, if we do not believe in "the restitution of all things," we cannot pray in faith, and consequently our prayers will not secure the promised blessing.

Our faith in the universal extension of the Redeemer's kingdom is based upon his own declaration, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. xxi. 5). He does not say *some* things, but *all* things. Why should we limit this renovating process? We are told by St. Paul that "where sin abounded, grace did *much more* abound" (Rom. v. 20). Popular theology is not in harmony with this cheering assertion.

When "the Leader and Commander of the people" (Isa. lv. 4) shall have completed his triumph, and brought all into subjection to his Divine authority, we may expect the fulfilment of the apostle's prediction, "When all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. xv. 28). It would be irrelevant for us to attempt an exposition of these mysterious words;* but two inferences from them are indisputable: first, that there is a time coming when all things shall be subdued to the King of righteousness and King of peace; and secondly, that a time is coming when "God shall be all in all." With such a prospect in view, what strong motives urge us to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord!" This glorious result will never be accomplished until the universal Church be united in unreserved obedience to Him who alone is her Head, and be animated by the Spirit of Him who said, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."

Cheered by the full assurance of final victory, the Christian Church may unite with the Jewish in offering the inspired prayer, inimitable in comprehensiveness and beauty—

* An able exposition may be found in Dr. Whitby's "Commentary."

“ God be merciful to us, and bless us ;
And cause his face to shine upon us ;
That thy way may be known upon earth,
Thy saving health among all nations.
Let the people praise thee, O God ;
Let all the people praise thee.
O let the nations be glad and sing for joy :
For thou shalt judge the people righteously,
And govern the nations upon earth.
Let the people praise thee, O God ;
Let all the people praise thee.
Then shall the earth yield her increase ;
And God, even our own God, shall bless us.
God shall bless us,
And all the ends of the earth shall fear him ”
(Ps. lxxvii.).

Let our faith grasp the promises which inspired these pregnant words, expressing as they do all that the most earnest Christian could possibly desire.

Adopting the glorious invocation with which the Book of Psalms concludes, we close this essay, believingly and hopefully anticipating the happy response—

“LET EVERY THING THAT HATH BREATH
PRAISE JEHOVAH!”

APPENDIX.

NOTE A. (Page 265.)

THE Hebrews, instead of asserting a *resemblance* between some person or object and another, speak of both as *identical*. Thus in the forty-ninth chapter of Genesis we read, "Judah is a lion's whelp" (ver. 9); "Issachar is a strong ass" (ver. 14); "Naphtali is a hind let loose" (ver. 21); "Joseph is a fruitful bough" (ver. 22). The psalmist says, "The Lord God is a sun and shield" (Ps. lxxxiv. 11). Hosea complains, "Israel is an empty vine" (x. 1). Our Saviour says of himself, "I am the door" (John x. 9); and, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John vi. 51); and, "I am the true vine" (John xv. 1). The apostle Paul, pointing out the contrast between the spirit of the Mosaic law and the spirit of the Gospel, compares the former to Abraham's bondwoman, and expresses the resemblance by saying, "This Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia" (Gal. iv. 25). In all these cases the meaning is that the subject spoken of resembles that to which it is compared. The words used by the Saviour in instituting the Lord's Supper were distinctly understood in this sense by the apostles. Had they been Englishmen instead of Hebrews, no doubt our Lord would have said, "This bread represents my body, broken for you: this wine represents my blood, shed for the remission of your sins."

NOTE B. (Page 394.)

The resemblance between modern and ancient Ritualists is remarkable, and somewhat amusing, as appears in the following extracts from the "*Directorium Anglicanum*." After having ordained that "if by any negligence any of the Blood be spilled upon a table, the priest officiating "must do penance forty days" (p. 90), it proceeds :—

"But if the chalice have dropped upon the altar, the drop must be sucked up, and the priest must do penance for three days.

"Also, if any one by accident of the throat vomit up the Eucharist, . . . if he be a cleric, monk, presbyter, or deacon, he must do penance for forty days, a bishop seventy days, a laic thirty.

"But who does not keep the Sacrament well, so that a mouse or other animal devoured It, he must do penance forty days" (p. 91).

Modern Ritualists breathe the same spirit as their Jewish predecessors ; but they very discreetly prefer penance to scourging.

NOTE C. (Page 428.)

The authorship of the Book of Job has long been a subject of interesting inquiry. Some have maintained that it was written by Moses, when in the wilderness of Midian. Others are of opinion that although Job may have lived about the time of Moses, this book itself was not compiled until the time of Hezekiah. One reason urged for this later date is the superiority of the style which so distinguishes it, but other writings of Moses compare not unfavourably with the Book of Job. The internal evidence, carefully examined, seems to point to Elihu as its author. This appears from his using the personal pronoun in describing the

effect produced on Job and his friends by the speech of their hitherto silent companion: "They were amazed, they answered no more; they left off speaking. When I had waited (for they spake not, but stood still, and answered no more), I said, I will answer also my part, I also will show mine opinion" (Job xxxii. 15—17). Had Moses or any other man been the author of this book, he would not have written, "When I had waited," &c., but "when Elihu had waited." So, when the author of the Acts records his journeying with St. Paul, he uses the personal pronoun *we* (see Acts xxi. 1—17). When not accompanying the apostle, Luke speaks of him as Paul, and of his companions as those who accompanied *him*. Only the author himself could employ the pronouns *we* and *us*.

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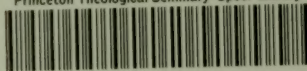
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